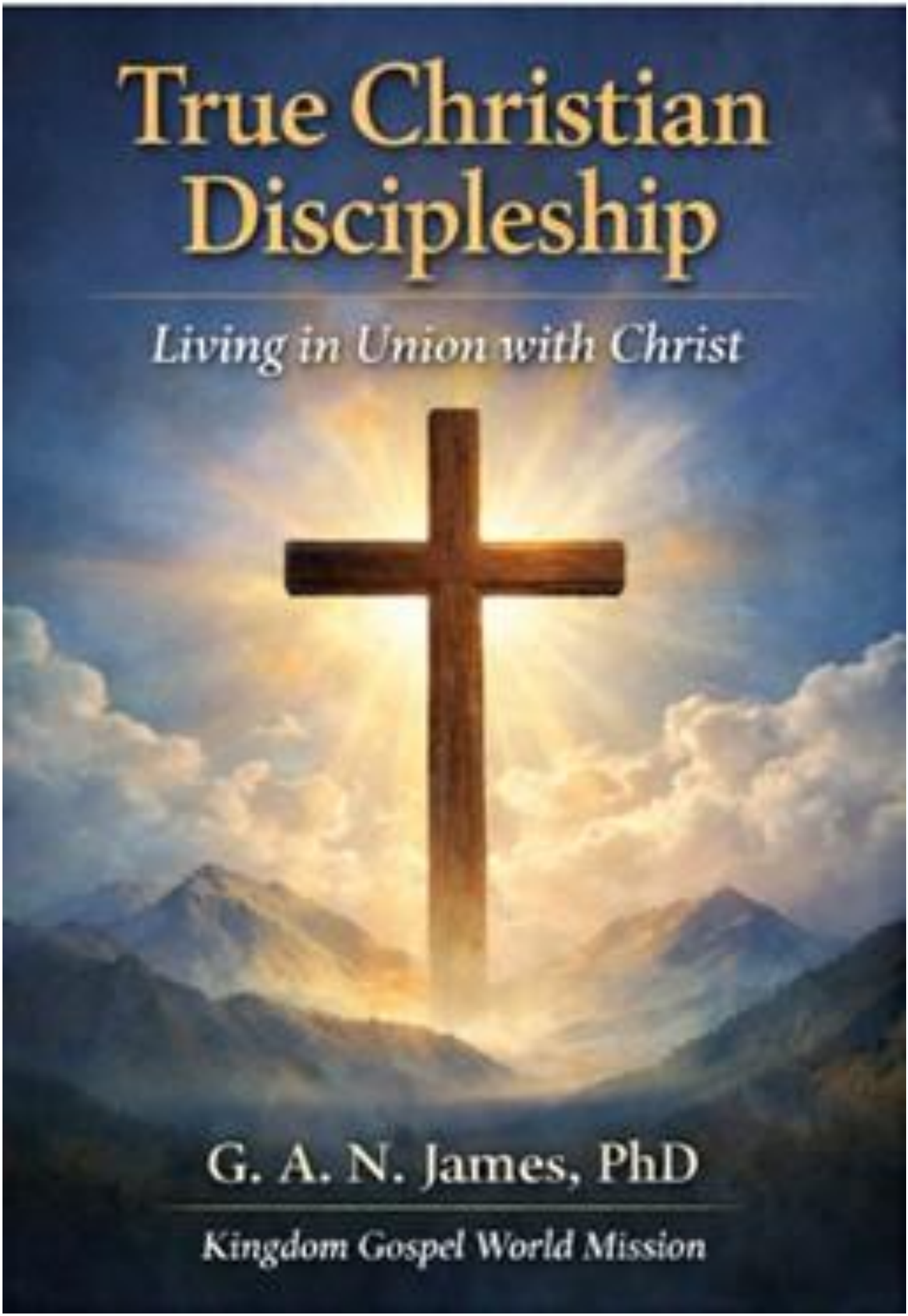
True Christian Discipleship

Living in Union with Christ



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Kingdom Gospel World Mission

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Published by

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Preface

This book was not born out of a desire to add another voice to the many discussions surrounding Christian discipleship, nor does it seek to offer a new method, system, or emphasis within existing frameworks. It arose instead from a quiet yet compelling burden of the Spirit to recover and proclaim the simplicity and finality of what God has already accomplished in Christ and to present discipleship not as human striving toward God, but as God's life freely expressed in those who are in Christ.

In much of contemporary Christianity, discipleship has come to be understood primarily as a process of moral development, spiritual discipline, and committed effort. While sincerity and devotion abound, many believers quietly struggle under the weight of an unspoken assumption: that following Christ ultimately depends upon their ability to deny themselves, obey faithfully, and persevere through sustained effort. The result is often a life marked by tension between desire and ability, between calling and capacity, between what Scripture declares and what experience seems to permit.

Yet when we turn to the words of Jesus Himself, and to the apostolic testimony that follows, we discover a radically different foundation. Discipleship, as revealed in Scripture, does not begin with human resolve, nor is it sustained by religious determination. It begins and ends with union with Christ. The call to deny self, take up the cross, and follow Him is not a program to be fulfilled, but a revelation of a life already given — a life that has passed through death and now lives by resurrection power.

The Spirit's burden in this book is to gently yet firmly bring the reader back to this ground. Not to diminish the seriousness of discipleship, but to restore it to its true source. Not to lower the call of Christ, but to show that God Himself has fully provided for everything that call requires. What Christ demands, Christ supplies. What God purposes, God performs. And what discipleship expresses is not the refinement of the self, but the manifestation of Christ in the disciple.

Throughout these pages, the reader will be invited to lay aside familiar categories of effort-driven spirituality and to behold discipleship as a divine reality already established in Christ. The truths unfolded here are not new in substance, but they are often obscured by religious habit and theological bias. They call not for intellectual assent alone, but for spiritual seeing that changes the ground upon which one lives.

This book is therefore written not to instruct the self, but to speak to those whom the Spirit is drawing into deeper rest, clearer light, and freer participation in Christ's life. It is offered in humility, trusting that the same Spirit who inspired these truths will confirm them in the hearts of those to whom they are given.

May the reader approach these pages not in haste, but with a listening heart — allowing the Spirit to testify inwardly to what He is revealing outwardly. And may Christ Himself be known not merely as the One we follow, but as the Life by which we live.

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Chapter 1

Discipleship According to Jesus — A Call to Death and Life

"If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me" (Luke 9:23).

An Invitation into Union with Christ

True Christian discipleship does not begin with man's decision, religious ambition, or moral discipline. It begins with a call from Christ — an invitation into union with Him, not only in His teachings or example, but in His death and resurrection, to partake of His nature and life. Therefore, discipleship is not the product of religious zeal or commitment to Christian principles. It is the divine outcome of crucifixion with Christ, the end of self, and the entrance into resurrection life in Christ.

The words of Jesus recorded in Luke 9:23 stand among the most searching and revelatory utterances in the Gospels: "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me." These words do not merely introduce the subject of discipleship; they define it. They do not function as an instructional manual, nor do they offer a pathway of religious self-improvement. Rather, they unveil the spiritual reality upon which true discipleship rests. In this single sentence, Jesus discloses that discipleship is inseparably bound to death and resurrection — to the ending of one life and the emergence of another.

From the outset, it is important to recognize that Jesus does not address these words to a select group of spiritually advanced followers. He speaks universally: "If anyone desires to come after Me." This invitation is broad, yet the terms are uncompromising. Desire alone is not sufficient. Sincerity, admiration, or even willingness to serve cannot substitute for the reality Jesus describes. To come after Him — to truly follow Him — requires a radical inward transition that only God can accomplish.

At first glance, this statement has often been interpreted as a set of moral imperatives: deny yourself, bear hardship, and imitate Christ. Yet such an interpretation subtly shifts the weight of discipleship onto human effort and resolves it into a series of duties. When read in this way, discipleship becomes an achievement to be pursued rather than a reality to be entered. However, a closer and more spiritually attentive reading reveals that Jesus is not prescribing three actions to be performed but describing the spiritual condition of a true disciple. What He speaks of is not method, but life.

Deny Oneself

A foundational truth of the Gospel that cannot be overstated is that Jesus' call to discipleship is inseparably joined to death to oneself before following Him. This is not a metaphorical statement, nor a theological development, but the very heart of Christ's own definition of discipleship. To "deny oneself" is commonly misunderstood as self-discipline, self-denial of pleasures, or the cultivation of humility through effort. Yet the self that Jesus speaks of is far deeper than habits or behaviors. It is the governing center of fallen human existence — the

autonomous self that seeks to live independently of God, drawing identity, meaning, and direction from within itself.

This self is not merely flawed; it is fundamentally incompatible with the life of God. Consequently, Jesus does not call for its refinement or education, but for its relinquishment. Self-denial, in this sense, is not something one does repeatedly, but something one acknowledges as already done — existence of self in true discipleship is denied because it is already judged and set aside by God. It does not exist in true discipleship.

The Nature of "Self" That Must Die

The "self" Jesus calls us to deny is the fallen, Adamic self — the self that assumes independence from God, self-determination, self-righteousness, and self-preservation. Scripture describes this self as the "old man": "Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin." (Romans 6:6)

Discipleship, therefore, is not moral self-improvement but participation in Christ's death. The self-life is not disciplined into submission; it is crucified. Only death can end its rule.

The necessity for the denial and termination of the self does not arise from an arbitrary demand of God, nor from a call to extreme devotion. It arises from a spiritual incompatibility that Scripture reveals with sobering clarity. The apostle Paul declares, "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God" (Romans 8:7–8).

Here, Scripture exposes the underlying reason why the self cannot be retained, improved, trained, or redirected into discipleship. The fallen self — governed by the carnal mind — is not merely resistant to God's will; it is incapable of submission to it. Its inability is not moral weakness but spiritual incapacity. No amount of instruction, discipline, or religious sincerity can bring the self into harmony with God's righteousness. What cannot be subject to God cannot follow Christ. Self cannot exist in true discipleship. This is why Jesus does not invite the self into partnership, nor does He attempt to reform it for service. He accepts nothing less than its end. He calls for the denial of its existence — the recognition of its non-existence — in true discipleship.

The Cross — the Executor of Self

The Cross, therefore, is not excessive; it is necessary. It is God's decisive answer to a life that cannot please Him and cannot walk in fellowship with Him. Only when the self-life is brought to its end can another life — one that delights in the will of God — take its place.

The call to take up the cross further clarifies the nature of this denial of the existence of self. In the context in which Jesus spoke, the cross was not a religious symbol nor a metaphor for inconvenience. It was an instrument of execution. To take up the cross meant that a person's life, as it had been lived, was to be executed. There was no ambiguity in this image for those who first heard it. Thus, Jesus was not asking His followers to endure suffering for His sake; He was declaring that following Him requires acceptance of death as a decisive and irreversible reality.

In first-century Palestine, the image of taking up the cross would have been unmistakable. The cross was not a symbol of personal inconvenience or moral discipline; it was an instrument of execution. To carry a cross meant only one thing: a sentence of death had already been passed. Jesus therefore defined discipleship as a call to relinquish one's autonomous life, ambitions, identity, and self-governed existence.

Significantly, Jesus says the cross is to be taken up "daily." This does not imply a repeated act of self-crucifixion, as though death were incomplete or needed continual reinforcement. Rather, it points to a daily living from the ground of an accomplished death. It is the daily acknowledgment that the old source of life has been brought to an end, and that one now lives by another life entirely. The cross is not something the disciple achieves; it is something the disciple consents to — by faith — in what God has already accomplished in Christ. This is why true discipleship manifests not as religious striving to be crucified but as obedient rest, humility, and Christ-cantered living.

The apostle Paul expressed this paradox beautifully: "For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God" (Colossians 3:3). Here, discipleship becomes an expression of life from a new source — Christ Himself living through the believer.

Divine Experience, Not Human Behaviour

Following Jesus, then, is not imitation in the natural sense. It is not the effort to copy His behavior, attitudes, or sacrifices while remaining the source of one's own life. True following flows from union. One cannot follow Christ while retaining the self as the governing principle of life. Only those who have passed through death can follow the One who is Life. This is why discipleship, as Jesus defines it, is inseparably connected to resurrection. His call does not end at the cross; it moves through it and beyond it into life shared with Him.

When understood in this light, Luke 9:23 aligns perfectly with the apostolic revelation later unfolded in the New Testament — that believers have been crucified with Christ, buried with Him, and raised with Him to walk in newness of life. Discipleship is thus not a human journey toward Christ, but a divine incorporation into Christ. It is not the believer striving to follow Jesus, but Jesus imparting His own life to the believer and expressing Himself through that life.

This understanding immediately distinguishes true Christian discipleship from many well-intentioned religious models. Where discipleship is framed primarily as learning, discipline, or moral formation, the self remains intact and active. The result is often earnest effort accompanied by inward struggle, inconsistency, and exhaustion. Such discipleship may produce outward conformity, but it cannot produce the life Jesus described. Christ never called people to manage the self more effectively; He called them to lose it.

Therefore, discipleship begins not with commitment, but with revelation — revelation of what God has done in Christ and of what that work means for the believer's existence. It begins when a person consents to God's verdict on the old life and receives, by faith, the life that God has given in His Son. From this ground, following Christ ceases to be burdensome striving and becomes the spontaneous expression of His life within.

Conclusion — A Divine Exchange

Discipleship begins at the Cross — not as an emblem, but as a divine exchange: the end of the old nature and the beginning of a new life in Crist. The call to deny self, take up the cross, and follow Christ is not a set of disciplines, but a revelation of the termination of an old existence and the emergence of a new reality of a life, not built by man but birthed by God: Christ in you, the hope of glory (Colossians 1:27).

This book proceeds from that foundation. It does not seek to instruct the self on how to follow Christ, but to unveil the reality in which Christ becomes the disciple's life. True Christian discipleship is not self-effort refined by religion; it is selflessness born of union with Christ, lived out in the quiet power of His indwelling life. In this light alone can the words of Jesus be heard not as a heavy demand, but as a gracious invitation into death that leads unfailingly to life.

Chapter 2

Why Conventional Discipleship Falls Short

"You nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down…" (Mark 7:13).

Human Models vs. Divine Transformation

Having heard discipleship defined by Jesus Himself as a call to death and life in union with Him, it becomes necessary to pause and consider why so much of what is commonly called "discipleship" fails to produce the life He described. This is not a matter of sincerity, for many believers are deeply earnest in their desire to follow Christ. Nor is it a question of biblical literacy, for Scripture is often carefully taught and diligently studied. Rather, the shortcoming lies at a deeper level — in the starting point from which discipleship is conceived and pursued.

Conventional discipleship, in many of its forms, begins with the assumption that the believer's primary need is instruction: clearer teaching, better habits, stronger discipline, or more consistent spiritual practices. From this perspective, discipleship is framed as a developmental process in which the self is trained to think correctly, act responsibly, and behave in ways that reflect Christian values. Growth is measured by visible progress, moral improvement, and increasing religious competence. While such approaches may shape conduct, they often leave untouched the deeper issue of source of life.

The fundamental limitation of conventional discipleship is that it frequently addresses the believer as a self that needs guidance rather than as a self that needs to end. It assumes that the old nature can be redirected toward godly ends if given proper instruction and accountability. As a result, the self remains central — now clothed in religious language, engaged in Christian service, and striving to live for God. The believer is taught to follow Christ, yet remains the one supplying the effort, the motivation, and the resolve.

Human models of discipleship focus on training the outer man but leave the inner man unchanged. It is possible to discipline habits, refine conduct, and adopt Christian behaviour without ever touching the root of self within. A person may learn how to speak kindly, serve in ministry, pray eloquently, or live morally, while the inner nature remains unchanged. Jesus made the issue clear: transformation must begin from within. "Make the tree good, and its fruit will be good" (Matthew 12:33). Fruit does not change the tree; the tree determines the fruit.

Misalignment with the Nature of the Christian Life

This approach inevitably produces strain. When the self is tasked with following Christ, obedience becomes effortful and often inconsistent. There may be seasons of apparent success, followed by discouragement and fatigue. The believer swings between confidence and guilt, zeal and weariness, depending on performance. Over time, discipleship can quietly take on the tone of obligation rather than life, duty rather than joy. This inward struggle is

often interpreted as spiritual immaturity or lack of commitment, when in fact it reveals a deeper misalignment with the nature of the Christian life itself.

In many expressions of modern Christianity, discipleship has been shaped by human ideas, institutional systems, tradition of men, and externally oriented religious routines. Training courses are offered, courses are completed, notebooks are filled, and structures are built. Yet, despite all this activity, the deep inner change Christ called for is often absent.

Jesus did not summon followers to subscribe to a program, adopt a religious culture, or attach themselves to an institution. He called them to deny self, take up the Cross, and follow Him — not merely in action, but in nature and spirit. True discipleship is not human effort shaping human nature; it is divine life replacing the old and producing what only God can produce: the life of His Son revealed in His people.

The old carnal nature — that is, the self-life — is not a suitable instrument for fulfilling God's will. As already noted, the Scripture plainly states that the carnal mind is not subject to God, nor can it be (Romans 8:7). Yet much conventional discipleship proceeds as though the problem was insufficient training rather than spiritual incompatibility. The self is exhorted, motivated, corrected, and encouraged, but rarely brought to the Cross. In such a framework, Christ becomes an example to imitate rather than a life to participate in.

Human models of discipleship focus on training the outer man but leave the inner man unchanged. It is possible to discipline habits, refine conduct, and adopt Christian behaviour without ever touching the root of self within. A person may learn how to speak kindly, serve in ministry, pray eloquently, or live morally, while the inner nature remains unchanged. Jesus made the issue clear: transformation must begin from within. "Make the tree good, and its fruit will be good" (Matthew 12:33). Fruit does not change the tree; the tree determines the fruit.

When discipleship focuses on behaviour — on doing the right things, saying the right words, following the right practices without leading the believer into union with Christ, it results only in religious performance. The old nature simply dresses itself in Christian language and behaviour. This is why some who appear spiritual under structured environments reveal unchristian characteristics when pressure arises. The old man has not died; he has only learned how to behave religiously.

Outward Performance Without Inner Transformation

This misunderstanding also shapes how success in discipleship is often defined. Emphasis is frequently placed on outward activities — such as faithful church attendance, involvement in ministry, personal devotion, and adherence to moral standards. While these practices may accompany genuine spiritual life, they are never its source. When such external markers become the measure of discipleship, there is a real danger that conformity quietly replaces transformation.

In such a setting, a believer may appear outwardly devoted while inwardly remaining governed by the old carnal nature — the same self-centered source of life — now merely expressed within a religious framework. The focus subtly shifts from life to performance,

from inward reality to outward visibility. Discipleship becomes something that can be observed, evaluated, and compared, rather than a life that is quietly lived from union with Christ.

As this outward focus takes hold, it inevitably reshapes the spirit in which church life and ministry are carried out. Cooperation gives way to competition, and service is increasingly measured by recognition, visibility, or perceived effectiveness. A misguided sense of spiritual distinction begins to emerge, fostering hierarchies of gifting, titles, and rank within church organization. Such structures, though often well-intentioned, quietly contradict the spirit of Christ's own teaching concerning ministry and relationship among His followers.

Jesus directly addressed this tendency when He warned His disciples not to adopt the patterns of authority common among the nations. He reminded them that greatness in His Kingdom is not expressed through position, control, or superiority, but through humble, self-giving service (Matthew 20:25–28). In doing so, He redefined greatness altogether — not as elevation above others, but as the willingness to serve them.

Where discipleship is truly rooted in union with Christ, ministry ceases to be a platform for distinction and becomes a vessel for life. Authority is not asserted but embodied in humility. Leadership is not exercised over others but shared among brothers and sisters who live by the same indwelling Christ. In such an environment, the life of Christ — not outward achievement — becomes the defining measure of spiritual reality.

We must remember that focusing discipleship solely on outward behavior leads to misguided outcomes. True discipleship should emphasize the transformation of the heart and spirit, guiding individuals toward a genuine relationship with the Lord. When we prioritize external actions over internal change, we risk creating a facade of righteousness rather than fostering authentic faith and genuine Christian character.

Separation of Discipleship from Salvation

Another limitation of conventional discipleship is its tendency to separate discipleship from salvation, as though one begins with grace and then progresses by effort. In this case, salvation is rightly proclaimed as God's work, accomplished by grace through faith. Discipleship, however, is often presented as the believer's responsibility, a higher calling that requires greater dedication and sacrifice. This subtle shift reintroduces human striving into salvation. Scripture consistently presents salvation as the outworking of divine life. The belief that one is saved by grace yet discipled by effort results in a divided Christian experience in which grace is admired but not fully trusted in the practical expressions of salvation.

Jesus did not draw such a distinction. The same Cross that saves also defines discipleship. The same resurrection life that justifies also empowers obedience. When discipleship is separated from union with Christ, it becomes a burden rather than a blessing. It asks the believer to live a life by his own effort that only Christ Himself can live. The inevitable outcome is either frustration or quiet resignation — settling for a reduced expectation of Christian life that falls short of what Scripture promises.

The Scripture exhorts in Col 2:6-7: “As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.”

Conclusion: Summary of the Outcome of Conventional Discipleship

What then is the outcome of conventional discipleship? Many who go through its systems emerge: trained in doctrine but not conformed to Christ; active in ministry but lacking the character of the Lamb; zealous in service but still dominated by self.

They are disciples in name, but not in nature — for the nature of a true disciple is not shaped by instruction but formed by the indwelling Christ.

Conventional discipleship, shaped by tradition, culture, or institutional methods, cannot produce what only the Cross and Resurrection can. Jesus never called men to follow Him through programs, principles, or self-discipline. He called them to die with Him to end their old self-life and rise with Him to receive His own life.

It is important to note that the inadequacy of conventional discipleship does not stem from malicious intent or doctrinal denial. Often it arises from a sincere desire to help believers grow, combined with an incomplete grasp of the radical nature of the Gospel. When the cross is understood primarily as forgiveness for sins rather than the end of the old life, discipleship naturally becomes centered on self-improvement. The mistaken idea is that the believer is forgiven yet remains unchanged to strive to walk pleasing before God.

True Christian discipleship, however, does not begin where conventional models begin. It does not start with what the believer must do, but with what God has done. It does not focus on shaping the self, but on replacing the self as the governing center of life. Where conventional discipleship seeks to make the believer more capable, true discipleship reveals that Christ alone is sufficient. Where the former emphasizes self-effort, the latter rests in union with Christ.

Therefore, the purpose of exposing the inadequacy of conventional discipleship is not to dismiss all teaching, discipline, or spiritual practices, but to reposition them. When Christ is received as life, instruction serves illumination rather than pressure, discipline becomes cooperation rather than compulsion, and obedience flows from life rather than fear. Without this foundation, even the most carefully structured discipleship program will fall short of what Jesus intended.

This realization prepares the way for a deeper unveiling of Christ’s own definition of discipleship. Having seen what discipleship is not, we are now ready to look more closely at what Jesus meant when He spoke of denying self, taking up the cross, and following Him— not as demands laid upon human effort, but as the unfolding of a divine reality already accomplished in Him.

Let the Cross return to its central place. Let the Lamb be seen again as the only transformer. Then true Christian discipleship will be recovered — not by returning to human traditions, but by embracing again the divine work God has already accomplished in Christ.

Chapter 3

The Threefold Revelation in Christ's Call to Discipleship

"Then He said to them all, 'If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me'" (Luke 9:23).

Inseparable Aspects of a Divine Reality in Christ

When Jesus declared, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me" (Luke 9:23), He was not presenting a sequence of spiritual tasks to be mastered over time. Rather, He was unveiling a single divine reality expressed in three inseparable dimensions. These words are not fragments of instruction but a unified revelation of what it means to live as a disciple. Each phrase illuminates a different aspect of the same spiritual reality, and together they unveil the significance of our union with Christ in becoming true disciples — a union in which His death becomes our death and His life becomes our life.

Rather than presenting death as a step that leads into union with Christ, Jesus' words reveal death itself as an expression of that union. Scripture makes this clear when it declares that we were not first independent selves who later entered Christ through dying, but that we were baptized into Christ Himself, and in that union were baptized into His death. "Do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore, we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:3–4).

Death, burial, and resurrection are not stages toward union, but manifestations of a union already established by God. What Jesus unveils in His call to discipleship is not a pathway into Christ, but the lived reality of being found in Him — sharing His death, resting in its finality, and living by His risen life.

Not a Prescription But a Description

It is essential, therefore, to approach this statement not as a prescription of a formula to be applied, but as a description of a reality to be discerned. Jesus does not say, "Do these things so that you may become My disciple," but speaks as One revealing the nature of discipleship itself. His words describe the inner condition of those who truly come after Him. They disclose what God has already accomplished and what must be spiritually acknowledged if one is to follow Him in truth.

To deny oneself, then, is to acknowledge God's judgment upon the self-life from the standpoint of union with Christ. It is the recognition that the self, rooted in fallen humanity, cannot serve as the basis for life with God and has therefore been set aside in Christ. This denial is not an act of self-suppression nor a repeated exercise of willpower. It is the inward assent of faith to God's verdict — that the old life no longer has standing or authority. The self has ceased to be the reference point of existence because another life has taken its place.

The taking up of the Cross reveals how this denial is made effective and lived out. The cross is not a symbol of religious commitment; it is the means by which God has brought the old life to its end in His Son. In calling His disciples to take up the cross, Jesus identifies death — not effort — as the way forward. The cross signifies that self has been decisively dealt with, not postponed, restrained, or managed. It marks the point at which the believer rests in God's action in Christ as final and sufficient.

The daily aspect of taking up the cross does not suggest an ongoing attempt to die, as though death were incomplete or uncertain. Rather, it points to a continual living from the truth of having died with Christ. It is the daily posture of faith that refuses to return to the self as a source of life, righteousness, or direction. The believer does not move toward the cross as a future goal; he is eliminated by it as an accomplished reality.

Union with Christ

Following Christ, therefore, is the natural outflow of this union. It is not the effort to imitate His actions while remaining the source of one's own life. True following flows from shared life. One cannot follow Christ while retaining the self as the governing center of existence. Only where the self has been set aside can Christ be followed freely and joyfully. Following Him is participation, not imitation. Christ does not merely go before the disciple; He lives within the disciple.

Seen together, these three aspects of Christ's call reveal discipleship as union with Him in death and resurrection. Denial of self corresponds to the setting aside of the old life — affirming its non-existence. Taking up the cross corresponds to participation in His death. Following Him corresponds to living by His resurrection life. What Jesus expresses in a single sentence is later affirmed throughout the New Testament as the believer's new existential reality in Christ.

This understanding preserves discipleship from moral striving on the one hand and spiritual passivity on the other. It removes striving because the self is no longer the source of obedience. Yet it also removes passivity, because resurrection life is active, expressive, and fruitful. The disciple lives, walks, and serves — but now by another life. What emerges is not inactivity, but a different kind of activity: resurrection life of Christ flowing rather than self-effort exerted.

Conclusion: Threefold Call into Discipleship as a Reference Point

Thus, the threefold call of Jesus is not a demand placed upon human strength, but a revelation of divine provision. Christ does not ask His followers to produce what He has not supplied. He calls them into what He Himself has accomplished and provides — elimination of self and imparting resurrection life. Discipleship is not sustained by determination of man, but by participation in Christ. It is not maintained by human resolve, but by relationship with Christ. It is the lived expression of a life that is not self-lived but Christ-lived.

These three aspects of discipleship are not steps of a ladder to climb, but a revelation to receive. It is not a prescription for discipleship, but a description of true discipleship.

Discipleship is not built on your commitment — it is founded on your co-crucifixion and co-resurrection with Christ — the daily acknowledgment that you no longer live, but Christ lives in you.

This is the Gospel that reveals true Christian discipleship. This is the message that must be recovered and declared to generate in those who hear the faith to be true disciples of Christ. This is the life to which we are called and chosen — living in union the crucified and risen Son of God, now living in us. This Gospel of the Kingdom is a universal message that shall be preached in all the world as a witness to all nations, but not all will hear and follow as true disciples of Christ. For whereas Jesus spoke to all about being His disciple, not all will be found living in union with Him, clothed with the garment of true discipleship, only the chosen will – "for many are called but few are chosen" (Matthew 22:14).

As we move forward, this threefold revelation will remain a steady reference point. Every aspect of true Christian discipleship — identity, obedience, ministry, and purpose — flows from this foundational reality. Only when this is clearly seen can discipleship be freed from confusion and restored to its rightful place as the outworking of Christ's life in those who belong to Him.

Chapter 4

The Self-Life — Its Origin and Rule in Fallen Humanity

"Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned" (Romans 5:12).

Origin and Nature of the Self-Life

To understand why discipleship necessarily involves the end of self, we must look beyond outward behavior and religious expression to the origin and nature of the self itself. Scripture consistently locates the problem of humanity not merely in what people do, but in what they live by. The self-nature, often referred to as the "carnal nature," the "old man," the "flesh," or "the natural man," did not originate with God's original creation. It came into existence at the Fall, when Adam and Eve disregarded God's rule and life. Instead, they opted for an existence governed by their own knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 3:6–7).

In that act, man accepted self over God, becoming self-conscious, self-reliant, and self-governed. The result was not simply sin in behavior, but a descent into a sin-nature — a nature separated from God and controlled by a carnal mind that "is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be" (Romans 8:7). Self became the center of reference, the seat of judgment, and the basis of identity. This inward change marked the birth of the self-life as Scripture reveals it.

Even when God was acknowledged, He was approached from a distance, as an external authority who demanded obedience and appeasement. The self-life thus learned to function apart from God, void of the life of God, while still retaining the capacity for religious expression through a conscience shaped by the knowledge of good and evil. This is why fallen humanity can be deeply religious yet profoundly estranged from the life of God.

Existence in the Flesh

The apostle Paul describes this condition of being void of the life of God as existing "in the flesh." The flesh is not merely the physical body, but the entire mode of existence that springs from fallen humanity living independently of God. Governed by what Scripture calls the carnal mind, this life is oriented toward self-interest, self-reliance, and self-rule. Even when it seeks moral good or religious devotion, it does so from a source that is not God Himself. As Scripture declares, the carnal mind is enmity against God — not necessarily through conscious hostility, but through inherent independence and alienation from divine authority.

To be alienated from God means to be void of the life of God, ignorant of spiritual things, utterly opposed and hostile to God (Ephesians 4:18; Col 1:21). The carnal mind that governs self cannot be educated, reformed, or disciplined into righteousness. "It is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be… those who are in the flesh cannot please God" (Romans 8:7-8). This explains why the self-life cannot be subject to God's righteousness or will. Its problem is not a lack of information or effort, but a lack of capacity. It was never designed to live in fellowship with God without having the life of God.

No Ability to Please God

Void of the life of God, the self-nature lacks the ability to please God. It is the source of all sin — not individual acts alone, but the very disposition that insists on independence from God. It is deceptive — it disguises itself as religious zeal, moral effort, or even spiritual ambition (Jeremiah 17:9). It is incurable — it cannot be changed by counseling, discipline, or determination (Romans 8:7). It is incompatible — it cannot walk with God, obey God, or please God. "Those who are in the flesh cannot please God" (Romans 8:8).

Every expression of pride, fear, insecurity, ambition, strife, or lust originates from the self-nature. Even man's futile attempts to serve God in his own strength come from the self-life. That is why Jesus said, "Apart from Me, you can do nothing" (John 15:5). Scripture does not speak of self as something to be corrected, but as something to be crucified and done away with.

Religious Nature

Importantly, self-nature does not disappear when a person becomes religious or even when one professes faith. It can adapt remarkably well to religious environments. It can pray, serve, preach, and make sacrifices. In such cases, God is acknowledged, but the self remains enthroned. This is why religious activity alone is never a reliable indicator of spiritual life. The self can imitate spiritual behavior without ever surrendering its central place to God, the source of spiritual life.

This reality explains much of the struggle experienced by sincere believers. When self-life is carried into discipleship, it becomes the silent engine driving religious effort. The believer seeks to follow Christ, yet does so by drawing upon personal resolve, discipline, and strength. When success seems apparent, pride subtly emerges. When failure occurs, guilt and condemnation follow. The cycle continues because the source remains unchanged. The self is being asked to produce what only Christ can supply.

Not Reformable but Terminable

God's answer to the self-life is neither reform nor suppression, but termination. God's purpose was not to manage sin, but to remove it

Many religious systems aim to manage sin through rituals, rules, and moral reformation. But the Gospel reveals something infinitely greater: God's purpose was to eliminate sin altogether by crucifying the "old man" in Christ. Romans 6:6 declares: "Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin." Here, Paul does not present sin as a behavioural issue to be corrected, but as a dominating entity to be destroyed. The "old man" refers to the entire human nature under the power of sin — and God's way of deliverance was to crucify it with Christ.

The Cross stands as His definitive judgment upon a way of life that cannot be subject to Him. In Christ, God has not merely forgiven the actions of the self; He has dealt with the self itself. The old humanity, represented in Adam and expressed through the self-life, has been brought to its end in the death of Christ. This is not a metaphorical statement, but a spiritual reality established by God's action.

Here, the wisdom of God is revealed. He does not demand that the self becomes something it cannot be. He does not ask fallen humanity to rise above its condition through effort or devotion. Instead, He provides another life altogether. The end of the self-life is not a punishment, but mercy. It is God's way of freeing humanity from a mode of existence that can never fulfill His purpose nor bring true rest.

Therefore, when Jesus calls His disciples to deny themselves, He is not calling them to despise their humanity, but to relinquish a life that has already been judged and set aside by God. The denial of self is simply agreement with God's verdict. It is the recognition that the life inherited from Adam cannot follow Christ and cannot share His fellowship. Only when this life is brought to its end can the life of Christ be fully expressed.

Conclusion: Elimination Is the Solution

This chapter prepares the ground for what follows. Having seen the origin and rule of the self-life, we are now positioned to understand why its elimination is not optional, and why discipleship cannot proceed until the question of life-source is settled. What God has ended in Christ must no longer be preserved by human effort. And what God has given in Christ must now become the believer's living reality.

As we move forward, we will consider more closely how God has brought the self-life to its end in Christ, and how faith rests — not struggles — in that finished work.

Chapter 5

The End of the Self — Crucified with Christ

"For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh" (Romans 8:3).

The Cross as the Instrument of Execution

The Cross was not merely a symbol of suffering or sacrifice. In the divine order, it was the chosen instrument by which God executed judgment on sin in the flesh. Romans 8:3 states: "For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh; God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh." Whereas the enforcement of religious rules and rituals proved powerless to bring an end to sin in the flesh, God brought an end to sin by exterminating self through the crucifixion of Christ.

In Christ, God did not excuse sin, suppress sin, or postpone sin's judgment. He condemned sin in the flesh — not Christ's own sinless flesh, but sin as it indwelt and controlled the human nature that Jesus took upon Himself through our union with Him in His death. The result is not just forgiveness but the execution of the sin-nature and the end of its dominion.

The Termination of the Self-Nature

God's answer to the sinfulness of the self-life is therefore neither education nor reformation, nor the continual management of behaviour. God does not attempt to instruct the fallen self into obedience, refine it into usefulness, or discipline it into righteousness. The Law did all of that but failed to eradicate sin. Scripture reveals a far more radical — and merciful — solution: crucifixion. What could not be corrected has been brought to its end.

The Word of God declares with unmistakable finality, "Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him" (Romans 6:6). The "old man" refers not merely to sinful actions or habits, but to the entire Adamic mode of existence — the self-nature that operates independently of God and cannot be subject to His will. God did not place this life under probation, nor did He attempt to rehabilitate it. He executed it in the death of His Son. The Cross, therefore, stands not only as the place where sins were forgiven, but as the place where the sinner, as the self-being, was exterminated.

An Accomplished Act

This truth is never presented in Scripture as an aspiration or a repeated struggle. It is announced as an accomplished fact. "We have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Hebrews 10:10). The apostle Paul does not say, "I am striving to crucify myself," but testifies with settled assurance, "I have been crucified with Christ" (Galatians 2:20). His confidence rests not in discipline or resolve, but in God's completed work. The self-life that once governed him has been stripped of its standing, and another life — Christ Himself — now lives in its place in him.

In the same way, when Scripture declares, “Those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh” (Galatians 5:24), it is not describing an ongoing act of self-mortification, but a decisive identification with Christ’s Cross. To “baptized into Christ” is to be united with Him in death (Romans 6:3). Faith does not crucify the flesh by effort; it agrees with God’s verdict upon it. What God has judged and put away, the believer no longer seeks to preserve, excuse, or reform.

The Wisdom and Kindness of God

Here the wisdom and kindness of God are clearly revealed. He does not leave the believer locked in endless conflict with the self-nature. He does not ask humanity to overcome sin by striving against its power. Instead, He removes the very ground upon which sin operates by bringing the old life to its end. The Cross is not God’s demand upon the self; it is God’s elimination of the self.

This is why the Cross must never be reduced to a tool for self’s moral improvement. It is an instrument of execution. It does not assist the self; it gets rid of it. Where the old life has been crucified, self is no more. And where self is no more, Christ now lives. And where Christ lives, sin no longer reigns as master. The believer is no longer called to manage sin, suppress desires, or reform the flesh through religious effort. He is called to let Christ live His life in him.

Complete, Sufficient, and Final

Thus, God’s solution to the sin-nature is complete, sufficient, and final. It is not found in what we do for God, but in what God has done in Christ. The Cross does not refine the old man; it ends him. And the life that now governs the believer is not an improved self, but Christ revealed and expressed.

The Cross is not an accessory to the Christian life — it is the place of the old man’s death. And this death is not something we must achieve — it is something we must believe. It is not our doing — it is God’s doing. “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death” (Romans 6:3)?

Deny the Existence of Self —Take up Your Cross

The true disciple of Christ acknowledges this by faith and does not believe that he lives from that old source. He denies the existence of his self-nature. This is why Jesus said, “Deny yourself… Take up your cross daily.”

This is not an exhortation to ignore or suppress self and to crucify yourself repeatedly — but to daily, continuously agree with the truth that the old self-nature is already dead. This is not striving to die — it is accepting the divine truth that what God has put to death no longer exists.

The central proclamation of the Gospel is not merely that Christ died for us, but that we died with Him. This truth stands at the heart of true Christian discipleship. The apostle Paul declares, “Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin” (Romans 6:6). Here, the self-

life is identified not as something awaiting death, but as something already crucified in Christ. The cross did not simply address what we had done; it addressed what we were.

It is crucial to recognize that the crucifixion of the self is not an experience the believer is asked to produce. Believers do not crucify themselves. God has already crucified the old man in the death of His Son. This distinction preserves the Gospel from becoming a call to spiritual self-effort. The believer's role is not to achieve death, but to believe what God has done and to live in agreement with it.

Crucified with Christ

The phrase "crucified with Christ" points unmistakably to union. The old self did not die independently, nor did it die symbolically. It was taken up into Christ and judged in Him. God did not attempt to separate sin from the sinner in Adamic humanity; He brought the entire old creation to the Cross in His Son. In doing so, He rendered a final verdict on the self-being as a governing principle. It no longer has existence before Him. "Crucified with Christ, it is no longer I that live."

As we have already pointed out to "take up your cross daily" is not about enduring hardship but about identifying with Christ's death — to enter into union with Christ's crucifixion. Another way it is mentioned in the Scripture is "always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested…" (2 Corinthians 4:10). It is the daily acknowledgment that we no longer live to ourselves — we have been perpetually crucified with Christ.

This crucifixion, however, is not merely historical; it is profoundly relational. To be crucified with Christ is to be included in His death because one is included in His person. Union precedes crucifixion. The believer does not enter Christ through dying; he dies because he has been brought into Christ. Faith, therefore, does not labor toward death but rests in death already accomplished through union with Christ.

The cross thus stands as the great separator between two orders of life. On one side stands the old humanity in Adam, defined by self-rule and independence from God. On the other side stands the new creature in Christ, defined by sonship, obedience, and shared life with God. The crucifixion of the self marks the end of the old order. There is no crossing back and forth between these two realms. What God has ended cannot be revived by effort, failure, or memory.

Freedom from Self-Management

This truth brings profound freedom. When the believer understands that the self-life has been crucified with Christ, the burden of self-management begins to fall away. There is no longer a need to constantly monitor, correct, or improve the self in order to please God. God is not negotiating with the self; He has already judged it. The believer is released from striving to make the old life acceptable and is invited instead to live by the life God has given.

Yet this freedom is often resisted, not because it is unclear, but because it challenges deeply ingrained assumptions about spiritual progress. Many believers instinctively feel that something as radical as death must be repeatedly enacted or painfully experienced. However,

Scripture consistently presents the cross as final, not provisional. To insist on continual self-crucifixion is to subtly deny the sufficiency of Christ's death. The cross is not reinforced by repetition; it is honored by faith in its sufficiency.

This does not mean that the believer never feels the pull of the old patterns of thinking or acting. Rather, it means that such patterns no longer define identity or has authority. The presence of temptation does not invalidate the reality of crucifixion. Self may attempt to assert itself, but it does so without rightful claim. Faith responds not by striving to kill it again, but by standing upon the truth that it has already been judged and put away in Christ.

Conclusion: A Gracious Deliverance

Thus, the end of the self is not a grim spiritual discipline, but a gracious deliverance. God has terminated the only life that could never please Him and has made room for a life that delights in His will. The cross is not God's demand upon humanity; it is God's gift to humanity — the means by which He frees us from the tyranny of self and opens the way for His Son to live in us unhindered.

As we move forward, it will become increasingly clear that the crucifixion of the self is not an isolated truth, but part of a larger divine movement. Death leads to burial, and burial gives way to resurrection. What God has ended in Christ, He has also eliminated completely — and what He has eliminated, He has replaced with His life. It is to this further unfolding that we now turn.

Chapter 6

Buried with Him — The Finality of Death and Release from the Old Life

"Therefore, we were buried with Him through baptism into death" (Romans 6:4).

Burial with Christ

If the cross declares the end of the self-life, burial declares its finality. Burial is the final disposition of a dead body. It is a formal indication that a body has been confirmed dead and may be disposed of. It implies that the dead body is no longer available or recoverable. Our burial with Christ is God's emphatic testimony that our old nature, having been crucified with Christ, is no more. It signals the finality or termination of the existence of our self-life. What God buries, He does not intend to exhume.

The apostle Paul expresses this truth with great clarity when he writes, "Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death (Romans 6:4). Burial with Christ does not add to the reality of our death with Christ, but it confirms that the old life has been decisively terminated. Death ends the old nature; burial discards it. In burial, God declares that the old order has no continuing place in His purpose.

A Truth of Immense Pastoral and Spiritual Importance

The finality of burial with Christ is a truth of immense pastoral and spiritual importance. Many believers accept the idea of having died with Christ yet continue to live as though the old life remains available for reference, correction, or improvement. The finality of burial with Christ confronts this tendency directly. It tells us that God has not only judged the self-life; He has terminated it. The old life is not under renovation; it is under the ground.

Burial signifies God's refusal to negotiate with the past. In Christ, He has closed the chapter on Adamic humanity. He does not invite believers to revisit who they were, to analyze the old self, or to manage its tendencies. The grave is not a place of dialogue or reflection; it is a place of final annihilation. What has been buried no longer defines identity, direction, or destiny.

This truth brings rest to the believer's soul. Much inward struggle arises from the assumption that old self still needs attention — that it must be constantly examined, corrected, or subdued. Burial releases the believer from this exhausting cycle. God has not assigned us the task of maintaining a dead old nature; He has given us the grace to rest assured of a completed burial of the old nature. Faith does not look into the grave; it looks away from it.

Assurance of No Condemnation in Christ

Being buried with Christ offers a comforting assurance to believers — it means they are shielded from any judgment or condemnation. In moments when we stumble or feel like we've failed, it may be easy to slip into blaming our past selves. This can create a confusing feeling, almost as if we're still tied to those old habits and failures of the old nature.

However, the powerful truth is that our old selves have been buried with Christ. The old nature cannot add to, take away from, influence or define our present new identity in Christ. Therefore, focusing on the truth that Christ lives in us reinforces our faith that our apparent weaknesses and failures in the face of challenges are not expressions of the old nature. They do not condemn us. Rather, they are opportunities that demonstrate the perfect strength of Christ that defines our new identity.

Like Paul testified in 2 Corinthians 12:9, when we face overwhelming challenges, we can echo the assuring words of Christ: "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness" and affirm with confidence, “Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.” Our response to every challenge we face actually works together for our good, reminding us that we now live in alignment with God’s purpose and not according to our old self-lives in alienation from God. Condemnation loses its ground where our burial with Christ is realized.

A Guard against Pride

At the same time, our burial with Christ guards against pride. There is nothing in the old self-life that can be reclaimed for spiritual advantage. The believer cannot boast in past achievements, experiences, or religious attainments, for these belong to a life God has discarded. Burial levels the ground completely. It leaves no room for confidence in the flesh, and no temptation to draw from the past as a source of identity or worth.

Importantly, burial with Christ is not something the believer performs; it is something the believer acknowledges by faith. Just as crucifixion is God’s work accomplished in Christ, burial is God’s declaration of closure. Faith simply agrees with God’s verdict. It ceases to appeal to what God has ended and turns instead toward what God has brought forth.

A Profound and Explicit Testimony of the End of the Self-Life

The most spiritually deep and clear explanation of the finality of the termination of the old self-life through union with Christ in His crucifixion, death, and burial recorded in the Scripture is Paul’s testimony in Philippians 3:4-11. This passage in Philippians opens an illuminating window into the spiritual finality of our burial with Christ and the decisive end of the old self-life as a source of identity, worth, or standing before God. We would not have fully completed our discussion on this subject without reviewing and reflecting on this Scripture passage.

Paul is not merely recounting his former religious résumé; he is bearing witness to a death that rendered that entire former life obsolete. Everything he lists — heritage, religious privilege, moral discipline, zeal, and law-based righteousness — once formed the substance of his self-understanding and the ground of his confidence. Yet all of it belonged to a self that has now been buried. In Christ, Paul has come to see that the old man does not improve, mature, or graduate into a higher spiritual status; he is laid in the grave. He commenced his testimony by pointing out: “Though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so” (Philippians 3:4). He listed his brilliant religious qualifications and achievements.

After listing his illustrious qualifications and achievements, Paul contrastingly concluded, "What things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ" (Philippians 3:7). He is not expressing regret over excesses or sins alone, but over virtues and achievements that once defined him. These were not immoral deeds but "righteous" ones — commendable in the eyes of men and even in the framework of the law. Yet death and burial with Christ place even the best expressions of the old self-life on the same side of the Cross as self's sinful works. Death makes no distinction between good and bad contributions of the old life; it brings all of it to an end. In this light, Paul's language is strikingly absolute. He does not say these things are now secondary or less important; he calls them loss, and even rubbish, because they belong to a former existence that did not and now cannot contribute anything to life in Christ.

Found in Christ

This is the profound meaning of being "found in Him, not having my own righteousness" (v.9). Burial with Christ does not merely forgive the failures of the old life; it nullifies its claims altogether. The old self, even at its most disciplined and religious characters, is no longer the source of his identity, righteousness, or acceptance before God. Paul's new identity is not an improved version of Saul the Pharisee; it is Christ Himself. To be "found in Him" is to stand before God clothed entirely in a righteousness that comes from God by faith — a righteousness that does not arise from personal history, religious effort, or moral record, but from union with the risen Son.

This explains why Paul's desire is no longer centered on preserving anything of his former standing, but on knowing Christ — "the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death" (v.10). He is fully engrossed in his new experience of union with Christ in His crucifixion, death, and resurrection.

Resurrection power is linked to burial. Conformity to Christ in His death leads to conformity to Christ in His resurrection life. The power of the new life flows only where the old life has been surrendered to death. To be conformed to Christ's death is to accept the Cross as God's final verdict on the self-life, including its most respectable forms. It is in this death that the believer is freed from measuring himself by past deeds, whether sinful or righteous, and liberated to live by the life of Another — Christ.

Attaining to the Resurrection of the Dead

Finally, Paul's reference to attaining "to the resurrection from the dead" is not a statement of uncertainty about salvation, but an expression of wholehearted expectation and assured realization. It is an affirmation that entering into resurrection life is unequivocally assured through union with Christ in His death. His gaze is fixed on a life that is wholly defined by resurrection — life that proceeds from death, identity that arises from union with Christ, and glory that belongs entirely to God. The buried past no longer competes with this new reality.

The central truth of Paul's testimony is that in Christ, the believer stands as a new creation, owing nothing to the old self, and drawing everything from the risen Lord. This is the quiet, liberating power of burial with Christ: the end of self-derived worth and the beginning of a

life fully rooted and blessed with all spiritual blessings in Christ. Union with Christ in His death and burial is the evidence of the non-existence of self. It is the basis on which the existence of self is denied and real fellowship with Christ is realized in true discipleship.

Revelation and Experience: How the Believer Discerns Spiritual Reality

At this point in this book, a crucial distinction must be made — one that determines whether these truths will be received in faith or quietly undermined by human perception. Many believers sincerely affirm what Scripture declares concerning the crucifixion, death, and burial of the old man with Christ, yet inwardly interpret their spiritual condition through their experience. They acknowledge the truth of God's Word, while simultaneously remaining conscious of felt impulses, thoughts, or patterns of behaviour that seem to contradict it. If this tension is not rightly addressed, the believer is easily drawn back into self-examination and uncertainty, despite the clarity of divine revelation.

We must learn to distinguish carefully between experience as interpreted through human perception and truth as revealed by the Spirit and received by faith. A believer may sincerely affirm what Scripture declares while at the same time remaining conscious of personal experiences — such as the perceived presence of an old sin nature or the felt influence of sin in daily life. This tension arises because human experience, when interpreted through the natural mind, is often assumed to be a reliable indicator of spiritual reality.

Scripture, however, exposes a deeper issue. The problem is not merely that human experience can be inconsistent with spiritual reality, but that the natural mind itself is incapable of discerning spiritual truth. As the apostle Paul declares, *"The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned"* (1 Corinthians 2:14). This means that even sincere, vivid, or consistent experiences — when interpreted through natural perception — cannot accurately define spiritual reality.

Decisive Principle of Spiritual Discernment

It is precisely at this point that Scripture establishes a decisive principle: reality for the believer is defined not by human experience, but by faith in the revealed Word of God. Romans 1:16–17 proclaims that the gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation for everyone who believes, and that in it *"the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'The just shall live by faith.'"* This declaration calls the righteous to live and walk by faith in what God has revealed, rather than by conclusions drawn from natural perception.

Thus, faith does not deny the awareness of experience, but it refuses to grant experience — interpreted through the natural mind — the authority to define truth. The believer's life is governed not by what appears true to human perception, but by what God has decisively revealed in His Word. To live by faith, therefore, is to submit human experience to divine revelation, allowing the Spirit — not natural reasoning — to determine spiritual reality.

When this distinction between revelation and experience is clearly understood, the ground of discipleship is firmly established. The believer no longer attempts to interpret the work of the

Cross through human perception, but rests in God's verdict and allows the Spirit to bear witness to it within. From this ground, we can now turn to the positive reality that follows the end of the old man — the life that emerges through resurrection and union with Christ.

Conclusion: Burial with Christ — A Liberating Experience, Not a Gloomy End

Thus, burial with Christ is not a gloomy doctrine, but a liberating truth. It announces freedom from self-introspection, freedom from self-management, and freedom from the endless revisiting of what God has already resolved. The believer is no longer defined by what has been buried, but by who has been raised.

This prepares the way for resurrection life. Burial is not God's final word, but it is a necessary word. Resurrection does not emerge from an improved past, but from a past that has been fully set aside. Only when the old self-life is truly relinquished and its existence denied can the new life be lived freely and without mixture. Burial clears the ground for life that is wholly from God.

As we move forward, we will turn our attention to this glorious reality — the life that emerges beyond the grave. What God has ended, He has replaced with what is new. What He has buried, He has surpassed. And what He has discarded forever, He has exchanged for the life of His Son.

Chapter 7

Raised with Christ — Discipleship as Resurrection Life

"God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ, and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:4-6).

God Raised Us up Together with Christ

The Gospel does not end at the cross, nor does it rest at the grave. Death and burial, though decisive and final, were never the end of God's ultimate intention. They were the necessary passage through which He brought humanity out of one order of life and into another. Resurrection is God's triumphant declaration that a new life has emerged, a life no longer governed by the self, but wholly sourced from Him in Christ. True Christian discipleship finds its positive reality here — not in what has ended, but in what has begun.

Scripture declares that those who are in Christ have not only died with Him but have also been raised together with Him. This resurrection is not merely a future hope reserved for the end of time; it is a present spiritual reality that defines the believer's existence now. The apostle Paul writes, "Even when we were dead in trespasses, [God] made us alive together with Christ…and raised us up together and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus." Resurrection life is not something we await in order to live; it is something we receive in order to live.

Proper Understanding of Discipleship

This truth of the present reality of resurrection life in us is important in the context of true Christian discipleship. It reshapes the entire understanding of discipleship. If discipleship is approached merely from the standpoint of death — self-denial, cross-bearing, and renunciation — it can appear austere or burdensome. When these realities are considered in isolation, Christian discipleship may seem defined primarily by what is relinquished, restrained, or laid down. Yet this perception does not arise because death and burial are excessive, but because they are viewed apart from the divine fullness they were intended to serve in discipleship.

In God's wisdom, death and burial are not preliminary disciplines imposed upon the believer; they are decisive works of God for receiving and appreciating resurrection life fully. Through the Cross, God brings the self-life to its end. Through burial with Christ, He confirms that this life no longer exists — it is no longer a source, reference point, or identity. Death and burial are therefore not losses to be endured, but deliverances to be received. They establish the necessary ground upon which true discipleship can exist in the power of resurrection life without mixture with the old self-life.

Significance of Death and Burial Enhanced in Discipleship by Resurrection

Only when the old life has been ended and set aside does resurrection take on its proper meaning. Resurrection is not introduced to replace death and burial, but to give expression to what they have already accomplished. Because the self-life has been brought to its end, Christ

now freely lives in us. Because the old identity has been buried, a new life can be manifested without competition or conflict with the old.

Seen this way, discipleship is neither a prolonged dying nor a pursuit of spiritual vitality. It is the living expression of the Christ-life made possible by a death that has truly ended the old and a burial that has fully discard it. Resurrection life does not diminish the Cross; it honours it. It does not bypass death; it rests upon it. What now appears as life expressed is the fruit of a death already completed.

Expression of Resurrection Life After Death and Burial of Self

Thus, discipleship is revealed not as loss endured, but as life expressed on the far side of a finished death. The believer does not live by continually dying, but by living from what death and burial have already secured. Christ's risen life becomes the active expression of discipleship precisely because the self-life, terminated through death and burial, no longer exists as its source. God did not bring the old life to an end to leave the believer empty, but to fill him with the life of His Son.

So, the Cross was never God's final word. Death was not His ultimate aim, but the necessary passage through which He brought humanity out of one order of life and into another. When resurrection life in Christ is rightly seen as the new order of life expressed in discipleship replace the old self-life terminated through the believer's death and burial with Christ, how discipleship is perceived is immediately reoriented. It is no longer defined by what is lost, but by what is given. The end of the self-life makes way for the impartation of a new life — Christ Himself living in the believer.

Resurrection reveals that discipleship is not sustained by continual dying, but by walking in the resurrection life of Christ. God brought believers through death so that they might live by a life that is wholly from Him in Christ. Thus, self-denial is not an end in itself; it is the removal of what cannot live in fellowship with God so that what is born of God may freely live unto Him. Cross-bearing, when seen in connection with resurrection, is no longer grim endurance but participation in a finished death that has already given way to life.

Not Suppression of Self, But Expression of Life

When discipleship is understood as the expression of the resurrection life of Christ, the entire tone of following Christ changes. Discipleship is no longer primarily about resisting the self, which has been terminated in death, but about expressing the risen Christ. Obedience flows not from suppression of the self-life, but from expression of the Christ-life. Service arises not from obligation, but from love. Holiness is not maintained by human effort but manifested through Christ's indwelling presence. What once appeared as loss is now recognized as release; what seemed like extortion is revealed as exchange.

In this light, discipleship is not a narrowing of life, but an expansion into its true fullness in Christ. The believer does not merely give up what is earthly; he receives what is heavenly. He does not merely abandon autonomy; he gains fellowship with the living Christ. He is crucified with Christ, and He lives; yet no longer He who lives, but Christ lives in Him (Galatians 2:20).

Resurrection life leads discipleship, not into a path of human struggle and endurance, but into a way of divine participation, where Christ Himself is the source, the strength, and expression of the disciple's life. Seen as an expression of resurrection life that has sprung from the death and burial of self, discipleship is properly understood as what it truly is — not a prolonged dying, but a new way of living.

Conclusion: True Discipleship — Life Lost and Abundantly Found in Christ

Discipleship, seen as the expression of resurrection life in a believer, is fundamentally different from the self-life that preceded it. Self-life is sustained by personal effort, governed by self-interest, and marked by inward struggle. Resurrection life, by contrast, is sustained by Christ Himself. It does not draw from human resolve, but from divine indwelling. The true Christian disciple does not live for Christ; he lives by Christ. This is why the New Testament consistently speaks of Christ not merely as Savior or Lord, but as life.

To be raised with Christ means that the believer's relationship with God is now defined by the relationship of Christ with the Father. His obedience is the expression of Christ's obedience. His delight in the Father's will is derived from the delight of Christ in God. The believer's life is not an imitation of Christ but an expression of the life of Christ who lives in Him.

Here lies the heart of true discipleship. Following Christ is no longer an external pursuit, but an inward expression. The believer does not strive to walk as Jesus walked by recalling His example and attempting to replicate it. Rather, Christ walks in the believer, and the believer walks in dependence upon Him.

Christ's life is not dormant within the believer; it expresses itself in the believer's thought, speech, conduct, and service. Yet this activity does not arise from self-driven ambition or religious pressure. It flows naturally, as life always does, when unhindered. The believer serves, loves, and obeys not to become spiritual, but because he already shares in Christ's life. This is why Scripture repeatedly exhorts believers to "walk" in what they already are. The call is not to become alive, but to live. Thus, resurrection life is not an advanced stage of discipleship reserved for a few; it is the normal Christian life.

As we move forward, we will begin to see how this resurrection life unfolds within God's eternal purpose. Discipleship is not only personal transformation; it is participation in something far larger than the individual believer. The life we share in Christ is the life through which God is fulfilling His eternal intention in the earth.

Chapter 8

Origin of Discipleship in Eternity Past — God's Sovereign Will and Divine Election by Grace

"He chose us in Him before *the* foundation of *the* world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love" (Ephesians 1:4).

Sovereign Wisdom of God

What has been revealed thus far is that discipleship is not sustained by human effort, but by resurrection life — Christ Himself living and expressing His life in those who are united with Him. Yet even this glorious reality does not stand alone. Resurrection life itself did not arise by chance, nor does it depend upon human initiative. It flows from a far deeper source: the eternal will and sovereign purpose of God.

Before resurrection was manifested in time, it was purposed in eternity. Before Christ was expressed in His people, He was appointed as the centre and measure of God's design. The life now lived in the disciple is not merely a personal spiritual experience, but the unfolding of a purpose conceived long before the foundation of the world.

To understand discipleship fully, we must therefore lift our gaze beyond the believer's experience and behold the sovereign wisdom of God from which this life proceeds. For discipleship does not begin with man seeking God, but with God purposing sons in Christ. It is within this eternal counsel — this election of grace — that the true meaning and security of discipleship are finally revealed.

It is to this sovereign horizon that we now turn.

The Sovereignty of God

True Christian discipleship cannot be rightly understood apart from the sovereignty of God. Before it began to be lived in time, it was already conceived in eternity. Before it began to be expressed through human lives, it was purposed in divine counsel. Scripture consistently lifts our gaze beyond the realm of human decision and effort, inviting us to behold a deeper and steadier foundation — God Himself as the sovereign source, sustainer, and fulfiller of all that pertains to salvation, sonship, and discipleship. "Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith" (Hebrews 12:2).

When the apostle Paul contemplates this reality, he does not reduce it to explanation, nor does he attempt to resolve its mystery. Instead, he is drawn into worship: "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!" (Romans 11:33). Then joining with the awe-inspired spirit of the ancient prophet Isaiah, he solemnly continues to exult the divine supremacy of the sovereignty of God: "For who has known the mind of *the* Lord, or who became His counselor? Or who first gave to Him, and it will be repaid to him" (Rom 11:34-35)?

God’s sovereignty is not presented here as a doctrine to be analyzed, but as a truth that humbles the mind and quiets the heart. His ways do not arise from human counsel, nor are they shaped by human initiative, but from the eternal supremacy of his sovereignty. Paul concludes: “For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things” (Romans 11:36).

Heaven itself bears witness to this truth. The apostle John testifies to this. Lifted in the Spirit to behold the divine splendour of the unveiled majestic scene of God sitting on His throne in heaven, he sees living creatures in the midst of the throne continuously declaring with unsurpassable reverence the holiness and goodness of God. He sees also crowned spiritual elders sitting on thrones around God’s throne. Then he watches in awe as these elders, moved and humbled by the living creatures’ consistent adoration of God, fall down before God and worship Him, and cast their crowns before His throne, saying: “You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created” (Revelation 4:8-11).

This worshipful vision establishes the proper ground for understanding the overwhelming reality of God’s sovereignty — that even those who assume wearing crowns for their perceived achievement of spiritual status fall prostrate and cast their crowns before the majestic throne of Him whose unveiled divine supremacy illumines the unequivocal truth that He alone is worthy to wear the crown of achievement and receive the honour and glory of being Creator of everything. It therefore makes clear the understanding that true Christian discipleship does not originate in human desire and effort to follow God, but in God’s will before the foundation of the world to bring forth a holy people in Christ. What is true of creation is equally true of redemption. As all things exist by His will, so all spiritual life — including discipleship — exists and unfolds according to His purpose.

God’s Sovereign Call and Choice of Disciples

Long before the coming of Christ to bring an end to sin and iniquity, God declared through the prophets His will to sovereignly bring forth a holy and obedient people. He detailed His intention through Moses and Ezekiel. Moses declared to Israel in Deuteronomy 30:6: “The LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.” And Ezekiel prophesied in Ezekiel 36:36-27: “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.”

The true disciple is the result of an eternal act of divine choice. The Scripture reveals that God's eternal choice was not random or reactionary. According to His will, He chose us in Christ, and He chose us unto holiness. “He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will.”

The sovereignty of God does not only appear at the beginning — it permeates the entire journey and secures the end. “Known to God from eternity are all His works.” (Acts 15:18). The end is already willed by God from the beginning.

Thus, the true disciple of Christ does not walk in uncertainty. He walks in a finished plan that was authored in eternity and is being revealed in time. Discipleship is not our journey toward God. It is God's journey in us to manifest what He has already purposed in Christ according to the good pleasure of His will.

Divine Election by Grace

Flowing from this sovereign will is what Scripture calls the election of grace. "Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace. And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise, grace is no longer grace" (Romans 11:5–6). These words establish a clear and uncompromising distinction. Grace and works cannot coexist as sources. Discipleship, therefore, is not sustained by effort any more than it is initiated by effort. Grace is not God's response to human striving; it is God's action from beginning to end.

True Christian discipleship does not begin in time, nor does it originate in human response. Discipleship has had its source in God's eternal intention long before a believer hears the call of Christ, makes a confession of faith, or takes a step of obedience, Scripture consistently draws our attention beyond the moment of conversion to the counsels of God that were established before the foundation of the world.

The apostle Paul opens this horizon when he writes that God "predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved" (Ephesians 1:5-6). This choosing was not merely unto forgiveness, nor even unto heaven, but unto conformity to Christ. God's intention from eternity was to have a people who would share the life, character, and sonship of His Son. Discipleship, therefore, is not an afterthought appended to salvation; it is the outworking in time of what God purposed in eternity.

This eternal perspective avoids discipleship from being misunderstood as a voluntary spiritual program or a higher level of Christian commitment. If discipleship begins in God's eternal will, then it cannot ultimately depend on human resolve. It rests instead on divine initiative. God did not wait to see who would qualify, respond adequately, or prove themselves faithful. He proposed discipleship before there was a world in which humanity could fall or strive. The call to follow Christ flows from God's decision to bring forth a people who are holy and blameless before Him in love.

This is why Jesus could speak with such calm authority to His disciples: "You did not choose Me, but I chose you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain" (John 15:16). These words are not intended to discourage faith or obedience, but to establish the divine source of faith and obedience. The disciple does not follow Christ in order to be chosen; he follows Christ because he has been chosen and appointed to be a fruitful disciple. Election does not arise from human willingness; human willingness arises as the fruit of election.

The apostle Paul reinforces this truth when he declares, "So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy" (Romans 9:16). Discipleship is not the reward of man's spiritual determination, but the outworking of divine grace.

God's Workmanship Created in Christ

God does not search for qualified disciples; He creates them. He does not wait for readiness; He supplies what His purpose requires.

Seen in this light, discipleship is not a higher calling reserved for a devoted few, but the inevitable expression of God's saving purpose. Salvation, sonship, and discipleship are not separate works of God, but one unified divine action by grace. The Scripture with clarity establishes the linkage between grace, salvation, and the holy walk of discipleship. Ephesians 2:8-10 declares that in saving us by grace and not because of our works, God created us His workmanship or masterpiece in Christ Jesus to equip us "for good works, which He prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."

This reflects well what is stated elsewhere in the Scripture — His choosing us before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless (Ephesians 1:4); predestining us to be His sons, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us acceptable in Christ (Ephesians 1:5-6), choosing and appointing us to be His fruitful disciples in Him (John 15:16). Scripture always connects God's promise to save with His purpose to bring forth a holy and blameless people, sons who are faultless shining as lights in this present world. Discipleship is therefore not an additional demand placed upon the believer after salvation, but the very life that salvation was designed to produce.

This eternal purpose also illuminates the place of the Cross and the resurrection. They were not emergency measures introduced in response to human failure. Scripture reveals Christ as "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13:8). Long before sin entered history, God had already determined the means by which His purpose would be fulfilled. The Cross was the divinely appointed end of the old creation; the resurrection was the unveiling of the new life God intended to share with His sons from eternity.

Discipleship, therefore, unfolds within this sovereign design. God did not merely foresee disciples; He foreordained its divine character — conformity to His Son. What appears in time as righteousness, obedience, and service is the manifestation of what God purposed before time began. The believer's life is not an experiment in spiritual progress, but a vessel through which eternal purpose is patiently brought to expression.

This understanding delivers the believer from anxiety and striving. Discipleship is not fragile, dependent upon human consistency or performance. It is upheld by divine faithfulness. God is not improvising; He is fulfilling His will. The same grace that elected, saved, and justified also works sovereignly and gently to bring Christ's life to expression in those who belong to Him.

Thus, true Christian discipleship is revealed as the outworking of God's sovereign will, the expression of divine election, and the fruit of grace alone. It is not human achievement crowned by divine approval, but divine purpose manifested through new lives. At the revelation of such wisdom, the only fitting response is worship — worship that rests, trusts, and yields to the God "who works all things according to the counsel of His will."

This truth brings both assurance and humility. Assurance, because discipleship is grounded in God's unchanging purpose rather than fluctuating human performance. Humility, because it

removes all grounds for boasting. The believer does not become a disciple because he chose wisely or committed deeply, but because God purposed graciously to make him a disciple. What unfolds in the believer's life is not self-authored devotion, but divinely authored conformity to Christ.

Conclusion: To the Praise of the Glory of the Grace of God

When discipleship is viewed apart from God's eternal intention, it easily becomes burdensome and uncertain. It is perceived as a process of human effort and sacrifice to please God. The believer may wonder whether he is doing enough, progressing adequately, or remaining faithful. But when discipleship is seen as an outcome of Divine intent, designed and sustained by God, the emphasis shifts from anxiety to trust. God is accomplishing what He has always intended. The disciple's walk is seen as a demonstration of the glory of the grace of God and not a measure of human diligence and commitment.

This does not diminish the place of faith or obedience. Rather, it establishes them in the right order. Faith becomes the response to God's initiative, a gift of God, not the cause of His action. Obedience becomes the fruit of God's working, not the condition for His acceptance. Discipleship, in this light, is yielding to God's work of grace within to be and do what is well-pleasing in His sight, rather than striving to please Him.

As we move forward, we will consider how this eternal intention does not remain abstract or distant but is actively carried out by God Himself in the lives of those He has called.

Chapter 9

Discipleship — Working Out What God Is Working In

"For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13).

It is God Who Works in You

If discipleship begins in eternity past in God's sovereign intention, it must also be understood as the outcome of God's sovereign working in time. Scripture never presents discipleship as a cooperative project in which God supplies grace and the believer supplies effort in equal measure. Rather, it consistently reveals God Himself as the active agent who brings His eternal purpose to fulfillment in those He has called. What God has purposed, He does not leave to human strength to accomplish.

The apostle Paul expresses this truth with remarkable clarity when he writes, "For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13). Here, discipleship is traced not to human resolve, but to divine operation. God does not merely assist the believer in doing His will; He works within the believer to produce both the desire and the ability to do it. The willing and the doing alike originate in God. Discipleship, therefore, is not sustained by human determination and effort, but by divine motivation and activity.

A Subtle Misconception

This truth corrects a subtle yet widespread misconception — that while salvation is God's work, discipleship is primarily ours. Such a view divides the Christian life into two realms: grace at the beginning, and effort thereafter. While believers may affirm God's sovereignty in salvation, they often revert to self-reliance in growth, obedience, and service. The result is a return to striving, now cloaked in spiritual language. However, no such division exists between salvation and discipleship. And Scripture speaks nothing of it.

The God who saves by grace also disciples by grace. As Paul appealed to the Galatian Christians who by faith had accepted Christ for their justification and salvation and was later turning to the Law for ongoing justification and validation: "Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh" (Galatians 3:3)?

God's Working Replaces Self, Not the Person

God's sovereign working does not bypass the believer's person, but it does replace the self as the source of life and power of the believer works. The believer, having become God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus for the good works that God appointed for him to walk in, is not set aside. He does not become a passive object, nor does he remain an autonomous agent. Instead, he becomes a living vessel through whom God works out what He has purposed. Now a new creature in Christ, His faculties and members have become instruments of God's righteousness.

The life of the Spirit of Christ, imparted to the believer through his union with Christ, becomes the guiding force within him. Self, having been eliminated, Christ living in him now empowers and governs him. What appears outwardly as obedience or faithfulness is inwardly the expression of God's work in him through Christ.

This understanding preserves the believer from two extremes. On one side lies self-effort — the attempt to produce spiritual outcomes through discipline, resolve, and willpower. On the other side lies passivity — the expectation that God will not act through human response. The Spirit gives a different understanding. God works, and the believer responds — not by striving, but by yielding to the working of God in him. Faith is not inactivity; it is agreement with God's working.

At the same time, this truth does not diminish but deepens responsibility. God causes he believer to exercise attentiveness, humility, and trust. The believer is careful to discern the working of God within and respond to the Spirit. Discipleship thus becomes a living relationship rather than a wearisome adherence to a system. The believer's role is not to generate life, but to remain rooted and yielded to the life of Christ within him.

Rest from Labor and Burden

Jesus Christ calls His disciples to rest in Him, not to labor and bear heavy burden (Matthew 11:38). There are those who incorrectly consider it a virtue to be burnt out while doing the Lord's work. On the contrary, Jesus announces: "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke *is* easy and My burden is light" (Matthew 11:29-30).

The truth is that through His union with His disciples, Christ provides the strength they need to serve Him. When discipleship is rightly understood as the outcome of God's sovereign work, at God's pace, and by God's strength, the believer is freed from anxiety and stress about progress and performance. Accomplishment is no longer measured by comparison, intensity, or visible success, but by conformity to the working of God within. Even apparent setbacks are no longer interpreted as failure, but as moments within a larger divine process. Therefore, serving the Lord, instead of being wearisome and burdensome becomes a joyous rest in Christ and a peaceful flow in the Spirit.

This perspective also reshapes the believer's understanding of obedience. Obedience is no longer a task imposed from outside, but a movement arising from within. As God works in him to will and to do, obedience becomes the believer's natural expression of God's will rather than the forced compliance of duty. The believer finds himself desiring what God desires, not because he has trained himself to want it, but because Christ's life induces its own inclinations within him.

No Merit, No Blame

Moreover, God's sovereign working guards the believer from pride and shame. If discipleship is God's work from beginning to end, then no one can claim credit for spiritual maturity, perseverance, fruitfulness, or accomplishments. All boasting is excluded. What remains is gratitude and worship.

It is also vain to lament over weaknesses. Just as success brings no personal credit, apparent failures bring no personal blame. God is not hindered by human weakness; He works through it. Paul discovered this comforting truth when He sought the Lord three times to remove a personal weakness that seemed to cripple his effort to deal with a persistent challenge.

Paul testifies in 2Co 12:8-9: "Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."

Because it is God who works in believers both to will and to do for His good pleasure, they are admonished to do what they are moved to do without complaining or disputing about what they do "that you may be blameless… sons of God without fault…" (Philippians 2:15). The believer recognizes that whatever has been produced in his life is the result of God's faithfulness, not personal effort. Therefore, in serving the Lord, he claims no merit and takes no blame.

Patience and Confidence in the Divine Steadfastness of Discipleship

This understanding also brings patience and confidence into the disciple's journey. God's work unfolds according to His wisdom, not human timelines. He is working according to His eternal purpose, not meeting human deadlines. The believer rests in the assurance that God is committed to completing what He has begun. Discipleship is not fragile; it is upheld by divine faithfulness.

This rest does not arise from confidence in personal faithfulness, consistency, or spiritual progress, but from confidence in God Himself. Discipleship is anchored not in human resolve, but in divine intention. What God initiates, He sustains; what He purposes, He brings to completion. The life of discipleship does not depend upon the believer's ability to hold on to God, but upon God's unwavering commitment to hold on to the believer. Jesus gives this assurance concerning His disciples: "And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand" (John 10:28).

This assurance flows directly from the sovereignty of God. Discipleship is not an experiment that God hopes will succeed if conditions are favourable. It is the unfolding of an eternal purpose conceived in divine wisdom and carried forward by divine power. God does not begin a work in His people only to leave its outcome uncertain. He is not subject to interruption, fatigue, or reconsideration. The same God who called, chose, and united the believer to Christ is the God who faithfully works within to bring that union to expression through steadfast discipleship.

Because discipleship is God's work, it is divinely steadfast. It does not stand or fall on moments of strength or weakness, clarity or confusion. Human inconsistency does not nullify divine faithfulness. Even when the believer does not fully understand what God is doing, God remains fully engaged in what He is doing. The disciple may falter in awareness, but God never falters in purpose. His work continues quietly, patiently, and effectively beneath the surface of experience.

Divine faithfulness also redefines perseverance. Perseverance is not the believer's determination to remain faithful at all costs; it is God's determination to remain faithful to His purpose in the believer. The disciple does not persevere by gripping tightly to religious disciplines or resolutions, but by being upheld by a God who does not abandon His work. What appears as endurance in the believer's life is, in truth, the quiet strength of God carrying forward what He has begun.

Thus, disciple journeys not as a fragile traveller requiring constant self-sustenance, but as a steadfast pilgrim upheld by divine grace and commitment. He walks forward not under the pressure of proving faithfulness, but under the assurance of being motivated and activated by a faithful God. In this assurance, striving gives way to rest, anxiety gives way to rust, and discipleship becomes the peaceful yielding to a work that God Himself is faithfully doing.

Conclusion: A Living Exhibit of God's Workmanship

Thus, true Christian discipleship stands revealed as the outworking of God's sovereign will by God's sovereign power. What He purposed in eternity, He performs in time. What He initiated by grace, He sustains by grace. The disciple's life becomes the exhibit through which God displays His workmanship.

As we move forward, we will begin to consider how this divine working expresses itself outwardly in ministry and service. Having seen that discipleship is God's work within, we are now prepared to understand ministry not as self-driven activity, but as the manifestation of Christ's life through those He is discipling.

Chapter 10

Discipleship as the Expression of Christ's Life in Ministry

"As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me" (Joh 6:57).

Discipleship and Ministry — Manifesting Christ in spiritual activity

True Christian discipleship is about living by Christ and walking by faith in God's appointed works. The journey of a disciple is not toward religious status or institutional office but toward deeper participation in the life and mission of Jesus Himself. Ministry, then, is the practice of discipleship. Like discipleship, it is not a role to be attained but a life to be expressed — the very life of Christ poured out in love and power through those who follow Him in union with Him.

In the New Testament, the word most often used for ministry is *diakonia* — a Greek term meaning service. It is closely connected with other words like *diakonos* (servant), *diakonein* (to serve), and *ho diakonōn* (the one who serves). But these words are not limited to formal roles within a church structure. They describe the practical, Spirit-filled actions of believers who carry Christ's presence into the world in whatever they do.

The disciple of Christ is a minister of Christ, called not just to be a learner about Christ, but a vessel — a channel through whom Christ lives and ministers. Jesus made this clear when He said, "If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also" (John 12:26). To serve Christ is to follow Him, and to follow Him is to be conformed to His servant nature through union with Him in His crucifixion and resurrection life. Ministry, then, is the natural outflow of discipleship — it is the manifestation of the life of Christ in practical service to others.

The apostle Paul describes this beautifully when he says, "We do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake" (2 Corinthians 4:5). Ministry is never self-driven or self-promoting. It is not about gaining influence, recognition, or religious authority. It is about becoming a servant because Christ — the ultimate Servant — lives in us.

The early disciples lived this truth. Their ministry was not confined to pulpits or positions. It happened in homes, in streets, in prisons, and in everyday interactions. Whether through feeding the hungry (Acts 6:1–2), encouraging the saints (Colossians 4:7–17), making tents (Acts 18:9), or proclaiming the Gospel (Acts 1:8; Romans 1:16), their service flowed from a deep inner union with Christ. Ministry was not their career — it was their calling and living as disciples filled with the Spirit.

Every believer, therefore, is called to ministry — not necessarily to stand behind a podium, but to stand in the grace of God and serve in the strength which Christ supplies (1 Peter 4:10–11). Ministry is Christ living His servant-hearted life in and through His people. It is not something we do for Christ — it is something Christ does through us.

As we explore the connection between discipleship and ministry in this chapter, let us remember discipleship is not an end in itself. It is a divine expression. When, as in discipleship, the self is denied and Christ is enthroned, ministry becomes the fruit of His abiding presence in the life of the believer. This is the ministry that honours God, blesses people, reveals Jesus to the world, and demonstrates true Christian discipleship.

Natural Expression of the Flow of the Life of Christ from Believers

Having seen that discipleship is the outcome of God's sovereign work within the believer, and ministry as the practice of discipleship, we are now prepared to understand ministry in its true spiritual nature. Ministry does not originate in gifting, training, position, or human initiative. It flows from life. More precisely, it flows from the life of Christ expressed through those who are united with Him. Ministry, therefore, is not something added to discipleship; it is one of its natural expressions.

Ministry is not initiated by human ambition or even religious zeal. It flows from the new life that every believer receives in Christ. Jesus declared, "He who believes in Me, out of his innermost being will flow rivers of living water" (John 7:38). These rivers represent the Spirit of God ministering through the believer.

True ministry does not begin with us. It begins with the life of Christ within us. Paul affirms this when he says, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me" (Galatians 2:20). The disciple who has died to self and now lives in union with Christ does not minister by natural effort but by spiritual outflow. The power of ministry is not in the vessel, but in the treasure it contains "that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us" (2 Corinthians 4:7).

Much spiritual barrenness arises when ministry is separated from life. In such cases, ministry becomes an activity undertaken for God rather than an expression of God. The believer serves, teaches, leads, or labors with sincere intentions, yet often does so by drawing upon personal ability, resolve, or zeal. When ministry is approached this way, it easily becomes burdensome, competitive, or exhausting. Even when outwardly successful, it may lack the fragrance of Christ's life because it is sustained by self-effort rather than divine supply.

Scripture, however, consistently presents ministry as the outflow of Christ's indwelling life. Jesus Himself declared, "As the living Father sent Me, … I live because of the Father." His own ministry did not arise from independent initiative, but from union with the Father. He spoke what He heard, did what He saw, and lived by the Father who dwelt in Him. In the same way, those who are united with Christ are sent not as independent workers, but as vessels through whom the life and will of Christ are expressed.

When ministry flows from resurrection life, its character changes. It is marked by humility rather than self-assertion, by dependence rather than control, and by love rather than ambition. The believer no longer seeks significance through ministry, because his identity is already secure in Christ. Service is no longer a means of proving devotion or worth; it is the spontaneous movement of the life of Christ toward others through a believer.

Only Christ Can Minister Christ

This also explains why ministry cannot be sustained by technique alone. Methods may assist communication or organization, but they cannot impart life. Only Christ can minister Christ. When the believer remains in dependence upon Him, ministry carries spiritual power because it is animated by His presence. Words may be simple, actions may appear ordinary, yet they carry divine life because their source is Christ Himself.

Importantly, this view of ministry removes the distinction between "religious" and "secular" or "clerical" and "laity" service. When Christ is the life of the disciple, all service becomes ministry. The measure is the expression of the indwelling life of Christ. Ministry is not confined to religious roles or church offices; it is the manifestation of Christ wherever He lives freely through His people.

Thus, ministry is not a separate calling for a select few, but the normal expression of discipleship. As Christ lives in the disciple, He inevitably ministers through the disciple. What varies is not the source, but the form. The same life expresses itself in different ways according to God's wisdom and purpose.

Not Performance before Man, but Participation in the Life of Christ

This understanding transforms ministry from performance into participation in the life of Christ. The believer does not minister by attempting to reproduce Christ's works through imitation, but by allowing Christ to continue His work through His indwelling life in him. Ministry thus becomes relational rather than functional. It is Christ touching others through His people, rather than people attempting to represent Christ through their effort. It is Christ radiating His light through us wherever He positions us, rather than we shining where we think we should. It is God diffusing the fragrance of His knowledge through us wherever He leads us, rather than we zealously publishing our knowledge of Him.

This understanding also guards against discouragement. When ministry is self-driven, outcomes become the measure of success. Fruitfulness is evaluated by numbers, recognition, or visible impact. But when ministry flows from Christ's life, faithfulness replaces outcomes as the primary concern. The believer rests in the knowledge that Christ is responsible for what His life produces. Our calling is not to generate results on our own, but to abide in Him to be fruitful.

At the same time, ministry as life-expression does not lead to passivity. Christ's life is active, purposeful, and outgoing. Where His life is present, it flows. The believer finds himself moved to speak, to serve, to give, or to intercede — not because of external pressure, but because Christ's love induces him from within. Ministry becomes joyful rather than burdensome, natural rather than forced.

In this light, ministry is restored to its rightful place — not on a stage for human performance, but in Christ for the outflow of divine life. The believer does not ask, "What can I do for God?" but rather, "What is God doing in me through Christ?" This question shifts the center from self to Christ and preserves ministry as an expression of grace rather than an imposed obligation.

Every Disciple Is a Minister of Christ

One of the great rediscoveries of the Gospel is the priesthood of all believers. The New Testament teaches that every believer is a holy priest, called to offer spiritual sacrifices (1 Peter 2:5, 9). Ministry is not confined to those with titles or credentials — it is entrusted to every disciple of Jesus.

Paul writes in Ephesians 4:11–12 that Christ gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers not to do all the ministry but "to equip the saints for the work of ministry." That means every saint — every born-again believer — is called to minister.

Conclusion: Discipleship Bears Fruit in Ministry

Discipleship is not a theoretical process or a classroom course. It is the real-life of a person in whom Christ lives. And the visible evidence of that life is discipleship expressed in ministry — a life lived for others by the power of the indwelling Christ.

Every disciple is called, equipped, and empowered to serve — not by human strength, but by the life of Jesus Himself. Ministry is not our achievement. It is Christ's outworking. It is the Spirit expressing the love, humility, truth, and power of Christ through the yielded vessel of a disciple united with Christ.

Let us therefore walk as Christ walked, serve as Christ served, and live as Christ lives in us — so that through our surrendered lives, the world may see and know the glory of our union with God in Christ.

As we continue, we will look more closely at how this life-expressing ministry is lived out in practical service. Having seen discipleship as the expression of Christ's life in ministry, we are now ready to consider what it means to serve by that life, rather than by self-effort — by a life that has emerged out of union with Christ in His crucifixion, death, burial, and resurrection.

Chapter 11

Christian Discipleship and Ministry in Service

"The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28).

The World's Model vs. Christ's Way

True discipleship flows through ministry through service from the indwelling life of Christ. This means that none is an act of religious service performed for God, but the outflow of divine life through those who are united with Christ.

The disciple or minister does not serve from self-effort but from his union with Christ. He is not a hired worker, nor a performer of duties — he is a vessel of divine expression, filled with the Spirit and quickened by the risen Christ.

In the world, greatness is the exercise of lordship, superiority, or authority over others. Jesus exposed and reversed the worldly concept of greatness in discipleship and ministry by defining greatness in the Kingdom as service in humility to one another: "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them... Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant" (Matthew 20:25–26). In the Kingdom of God: greatness is service; discipleship is selflessness in service; ministry is lowliness in service.

Unlike the world's institutions and organizations, the Kingdom of God does not exalt charisma, ambition, performance, titles, or ranks. It exalts Christ alone — and His life is one of selfless service, obedience, humility, and love. "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve."

Ministry Begins at the Cross

Before one can be a disciple or minister who serves, he must die. The old self-serving man must be crucified and resurrected with Christ so that self is eliminated and Christ lives in him. Otherwise, his service or ministry will be tainted by self-seeking — the need for recognition, applause, power, or security. The testimony of a true disciple of Christ is: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me" (Galatians 2:20).

This is not a poetic affirmation. It is a spiritual reality in every true Christian disciple. If the self-nature is not put to death, ministry becomes a projection of self in religious disguise. True Christian ministry begins with this inner crucifixion and resurrection in union with Christ — the end of self and the emergence of Christ living and serving through us.

Serving by the Power of God

The power of discipleship is not human will but the resurrection life of Jesus Christ. The disciple ministers not in his strength, but in the strength of the indwelling Lord: "Whoever speaks, let it be as one who speaks the very words of God; whoever serves, let it be with the

strength which God supplies, so that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 4:11).

Every act of true ministry is God glorifying Himself through His people in gracious service. The apostle Paul said: "I labour, striving according to His working which works in me mightily" (Colossians 1:29). He acknowledged the insufficiency of self and the all-sufficiency that comes from God: "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God" (2 Corinthians 3:5). He further declared in 2 Corinthians 9:8: "God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work."

Discipleship in Ministry Is Not a Role: It Is a Manifestation of Christ

The ministry of a disciple is not about clerical titles or ranks. It is not limited to pulpits or platforms. It is Christ operating in divine service through the disciple. It is the manifestation of Christ wherever the disciple is. Living in union with Christ, the disciple carries and diffuses the fragrance of the presence of Christ wherever the Spirit leads him. Paul states in 2 Corinthians 2:14, "Now thanks *be* to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place."

Spiritual gifts are diverse expressions of the One Gift — Christ. The gifts of the Spirit are not personal possessions. They are manifestations of Christ through the Spirit in the ministry of a disciple of Christ. The gift of teaching is Christ the Teacher revealing truth. The gift of healing is Christ the Healer healing through yielded vessels. Gifts are not to exalt the disciple but to edify the Body and glorify the Head. "To each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good" (1 Corinthians 12:7).

Christian Service: The Expression of Christ-Life in Discipleship and Ministry

If Christian discipleship is the expression of Christ's life in ministry, then Christian service is the practical form of the expression of Christ's life through both discipleship and ministry. Christian service is where the life of Christ touches the practical realities of human need, weakness, and limitation. Yet here, perhaps more than anywhere else, the difference between self-driven activity and Christ-driven expression becomes most apparent. True Christian service cannot be understood apart from the Christ-life by which it is rendered.

Christian service does not stand as a separate obligation added to Christian discipleship, nor does it function as an independent sphere of Christian activity. Service flows naturally from the same source as discipleship and ministry: the indwelling life of Christ. Where Christ lives freely in the believer, His life inevitably moves outward in discipleship, ministry and service. Thus, service is not something the disciple decides to do for God, but something Christ does through the disciple as His life is expressed.

When service is disconnected from discipleship and ministry as expressions of union with Christ, it easily becomes self-generated work. In such cases, the believer serves from a sense of responsibility, religious duty, or personal devotion. Though sincere, this kind of service often draws its strength from the self-life rather than from Christ. It places the believer at the center as the source of activity and gradually reintroduces effort, strain, comparison, and the

pressure to perform. Service then becomes something sustained by human resolve instead of divine life.

Service in Union with Christ

In contrast, when service is understood within the context of discipleship as union with Christ, its nature is entirely transformed. The believer no longer serves as an independent agent acting on behalf of God, but as a vessel through whom Christ continues His own ministry. Just as Jesus lived and served by the life of the Father dwelling in Him, so the disciple serves by the life of Christ dwelling within. Service, therefore, is not an act of substitution — where the believer works in Christ's absence — but an act of participation, where Christ Himself is present and active in all that the believer does.

Those who are united with Christ do not serve by summoning their human energy from within themselves, but by yielding to the Christ-life that dwells within them. Service, in this sense, is not something added to discipleship; it is discipleship lived outwardly. Christ does not merely instruct His followers on how to serve; He serves through them. He says to His disciples: "I am the vine; you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5).

Serving by the life of Christ transforms both the motive and the manner of service. The motive is no longer obligation or recognition, but love flowing naturally from Christ's own heart. The manner is no longer strained or anxious, but gentle and free. Even when service requires sacrifice, it is not burdensome, because it is carried by the Christ-life rather than sustained by human resolve.

Serving by Christ's life also guards the believer from burnout. Burnout is not merely the result of doing too much; it is often the result of doing the right things from the wrong source. When the self becomes the source of service, it is inevitably depleted. But Christ's life is inexhaustible. The believer who learns to serve from dependence on the life of Christ within rather than self-reliance discovers that rest and service are not opposites. One may serve diligently while remaining inwardly at rest.

This truth shapes the believer's correct response to limitation and weakness. In self-driven service, weakness is seen as an obstacle to effectiveness. In Christ-driven service, weakness becomes a context for Christ's sufficiency. The believer no longer seeks to overcome weakness through effort but allows Christ to be expressed through it. Service thus becomes a testimony not to human capability, but to divine grace. The strength of Christ "is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Serving by the life of Christ also defines faithfulness. Faithfulness is no longer measured by volume of activity, but by dependence on the life of Christ. A quiet act done in dependence upon Christ may carry more spiritual weight than great labor done in self-effort. God is not impressed by the scale of work done; He is pleased by what He does through His servant. True Christian service may be hidden, unnoticed, or seemingly insignificant, yet precious in His sight because it is produced through the life of His Son. Thus, true Christian service is not an obligation imposed upon disciples, but a privilege that emerges from union with Christ. It is Christ loving, Christ giving, Christ bearing burdens through His disciples.

Thus, Christian service is not the believer's contribution to God's work, but God's work continued through the believer. It is the fruit of a life that has been raised from death and burial with Christ and now lives by His resurrection life. The end of the self-life makes room for the service of Christ; the life of Christ gives service its substance and meaning.

Conclusion: Discipleship, Ministry, and Service — Outflows of the Christ-Life

Seen in this light, discipleship, ministry, and service are not separate stages or callings, but different expressions of the one divine life working out God's purpose in and through His people. Where Christ lives freely, He will express Himself in discipleship, ministry, and service according to God's wisdom and purpose.

What begins as inward union with Christ in discipleship unfolds as ministry outwardly and is expressed practically in service. Together, they form a single movement of God's life — originating in His sovereign will and moving steadily toward the fulfillment of His eternal design. It is within this larger purpose of God, stretching beyond the individual believer and reaching into the fullness of His times, that the true meaning and destiny of discipleship are finally understood.

In the final chapter, we will lift our gaze once more from the believer's experience to God's ultimate aim. Discipleship is not only about transformed individuals, but about the manifestation of God's eternal purpose in Christ. It is to this glorious vision that we now turn.

Chapter 12

Union with Christ — Life Shared, Not Lives Partnered

"That they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us" (John 17:21).

Participation in the Christ-Life

At the heart of true Christian discipleship lies a reality far deeper than religious commitment or cooperative service with Christ. It is the mystery of union with Christ. This union is not a partnership between two independent lives — the divine life of Christ and the human life of the believer — working side by side. It is the sharing of one life — the Christ-life. It is participation in the life of Christ, not collaboration with Christ; the believer indwelling Christ, not associating with Christ.

Jesus Himself revealed this mystery when He prayed, *"That they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us"* (John 17:21). Here, the Lord did not describe a moral agreement or spiritual alignment. He spoke of the same kind of union that exists between the Father and the Son—a union of life, essence, and will. This prayer lifts discipleship out of the realm of imitation and places it firmly in the realm of participation. The believer is not called to live *for* Christ, but to live *in* Christ, and to have Christ live *in him*.

Baptized into Christ

This union begins when the Spirit baptized us into Christ. To be baptized into Christ means more than immersion into water to signify one's commitment to repent of sin and follow Christ. It is the reality of being spiritually incorporated into the nature and life of Christ. Scripture declares that we were baptized into Christ Jesus, baptized into His death, buried with Him, and raised with Him to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:3–5). This language is not symbolic exaggeration; it describes a spiritual reality accomplished by God Himself.

The old man was not reformed or partnered with Christ — he was crucified and discarded through burial. What emerges on the other side of the Cross is not a better Adam, but a new creation in Christ. Paul plainly affirms: "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ" Galatians 3:27).

Baptism into Christ brings us into union with Christ. His history has become our history. His death is our death. His resurrection is our resurrection. His ascended life is now the sphere in which we live. Scripture tells us that God has raised us up together and seated us together with Christ in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 2:6). Discipleship, therefore, is not lived by human effort; it is lived by the power of the Spirit of God who raised us up together and seated us together with Christ in the heavenly realms. This is why union with Christ cannot be reduced to partnership language. A partner retains ownership of his own life and contributes effort alongside another. But in union with Christ, the believer no longer belongs to himself but to Christ, who lives in him.

He has died, and his life is hidden with Christ in God (Colossians 3:3). Christ does not assist our life; He replaces it with His own. He does not improve our nature; He becomes our nature.

To be in union with Christ through discipleship is to live by the life of Christ received by grace and sustained by the Spirit. It is the end of religious striving and the beginning of restful participation in the nature and life of Christ. It is not man holding onto God, but God holding man within Himself.

New Creature in Christ

The subject of being a new creature in Christ through union with Christ is not merely a doctrine of the Christian life; it is the very heart of the Gospel and the foundation of true discipleship. To speak of being a new creature in Christ is to speak of an entirely new order of existence brought forth by God Himself.

When Scripture declares, *"If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new"* (2 Corinthians 5:17), it is announcing not a moral adjustment but a divine act of creation. This is not the old human identity repaired, improved, elevated, or spiritualized. It is the end of one mode of existence and the beginning of another. God does not recycle the old man; He brings him to his end and brings forth something altogether new.

The "old things" that have passed away are not merely sinful habits or former behaviours. They include the entire Adamic identity: the self-derived from natural birth, shaped by human inheritance, sustained by self-effort, and defined by separation from God. This old identity lived from the soul, reasoned independently of God, sought meaning from itself, and operated under the power of sin and death. In the Cross of Christ, God pronounced His final verdict on that humanity. The old man was not put on probation; he was crucified. His history was concluded in the death of Christ.

In Christ Identity

To be *in Christ*, therefore, is to have crossed a boundary of existence. The believer has passed out of the old creation and into the new. This is why Scripture consistently speaks of death and resurrection, burial and new birth. These are not metaphors for moral change; they are descriptions of ontological change — change in being. The new creature is not the old creature behaving differently; the new creature is the result of divine generation. *"That which is born of the Spirit is spirit"* (John 3:6). The new creation is born of God, not of human will, effort, or lineage.

This means that the new creature's identity is no longer humanly defined. Its life does not originate in Adam but in Christ. Its nature is not derived from the flesh but from the Spirit. Its defining reality is not what it once was, but who Christ is. The new creature is not an independent self-living for God, but a being whose life is Christ Himself. Paul could therefore say without exaggeration, *"It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me"* (Galatians 2:20). This is not poetic devotion; it is spiritual reality.

The absence of the old human identity does not mean the erasure of personality or individuality. Rather, it means the removal of the Adamic source from which identity once flowed. The old "I" — the self that lived apart from God, asserted its own will, sought its own righteousness, and preserved its own life — has no place in the new creation. In its place stands a new "I," defined not by selfhood but by sonship, not by autonomy but by union with Christ. The new creature lives *from* Christ, *by* Christ, and *unto* Christ.

This is where union with Christ becomes decisive. The new creature exists only *in Christ*. Outside of Him, there is no new creation. But in Him, the believer shares His life, His standing, His righteousness, and His relationship with the Father. As Christ is, so is the new creature's source, nature, and destiny. The new creature is not a follower walking behind Christ in distance; he is a participant living by Christ from within.

Newness of Life

This is why the new creature bears no trace of the old identity as a governing principle. The new life does not carry over the old nature in a subdued form. Scripture does not say the old man was restrained; it says he was crucified. The new creature is characterized by an entirely new set of realities: a new heart, a new spirit, a new law of life, a new consciousness of God, and a new capacity to live unto Him. *"The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death"* (Romans 8:2).

Importantly, this newness is not progressive in its origin. Growth may be progressive in experience, but the new creation itself is complete in its birth. God does not create partially. *"You are complete in Him"* (Colossians 2:10). The believer does not grow into being a new creature; he grows in the understanding, expression, and manifestation of what he already is. Discipleship, therefore, is not the gradual replacement of the old man with the new, but the unveiling of the new man where the old once claimed to exist.

Thus, to proclaim the new creation is to proclaim the end of the old human story and the beginning of a divine one. It is to call believers out of self-effort, self-definition, and self-consciousness into rest, faith, and Christ-consciousness. True discipleship flows naturally from this reality. When the believer sees that the old life has ended and a new life has begun, striving ceases and abiding begins. Obedience becomes expression. Holiness becomes nature. Service becomes overflow.

This is the glory of the Gospel: God has not asked man to improve himself so that he may follow Christ. God has put man to death in Christ and raised him as a new creature, so that Christ Himself may be his life. This is not partnership with Christ. This is union with Christ. This is not cooperation with Christ. This is participation in the Christ-life. And this is the life to which the Spirit bears continual witness in all who are born of God and are disciples of Christ.

Chapter 13

Living from the Indwelling Christ — Participation in Divine Life

"Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me" (John 15:4).

Expressing the Indwelling Life of Christ

If union with Christ defines our position, then the indwelling Christ defines our daily experience. Discipleship is not merely the acknowledgment of a truth; it is the living out of that truth as Christ expresses His life through those who belong to Him. The Christian life is not sustained by memory of what Christ did, but by communion with who Christ is now, living within us.

Jesus described this living union in simple, organic language: *"Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me"* (John 15:4). The branch does not strive to produce fruit, nor does it cooperate with the vine as an equal contributor. It simply remains in the vine. The life of the vine flows through it. And it produces the fruit of the vine. All effort to live the Christian life apart from this abiding in Christ is ultimately fruitless, for the life that produces fruit is not human life energized by God — it is divine life expressed through humanity.

This indwelling Christ is the reality Paul proclaimed when he said, *"Christ in you, the hope of glory"* (Colossians 1:27). The glory of God is not revealed through human excellence, discipline, or zeal, but through the life of the Son quietly manifested in yielded vessels. The believer does not generate this life; he receives it. He does not manage it; he yields to it. He does not control it; he trusts the One who indwells him.

God at Work within the Disciple

Scripture is clear that God Himself is at work within the disciple. *"For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure"* (Philippians 2:13). This is not poetic encouragement — it is a profound declaration of divine sovereignty in the believer's inner life. The willing and the doing both originate in God. The disciple's role is not self-initiation, but availability to God. Not self-direction, but submission to God. Not striving, but trust in God.

This indwelling life of Christ is complete and sufficient. *"In Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him"* (Colossians 2:9–10). Nothing is lacking. Nothing needs to be supplemented. Discipleship is not a quest for what we do not yet have; it is a discovery of what we already possess in Christ. As this truth settles into the heart, anxiety gives way to rest, effort yields to faith, and service becomes an outflow rather than tedious response to a demand. The same God who established this union is faithful to sustain it. He equips us with everything good to do His will, working in us what is pleasing in His sight through Jesus Christ (Hebrews 13:21). True Christian disciples, therefore, focus on what Christ does and can do through them rather than on what they do or can do.

Casting Crowns before God's Throne

Ministry, obedience, endurance, and love are no longer human achievements offered to God, but divine expressions flowing from God through the believer. Jesus stated that with divine plainness and clarity in John 15:16: *"You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you."* This sobering declaration brings us onto holy ground before God sitting on His throne, where disciples fall prostrate in worship before Him and cast their crowns at the foot of His throne (Revelation 4:10-11). It unveils discipleship not as a human initiative, but as a sovereign act of God that precedes, governs, and guarantees the life and fruitfulness of those who belong to Christ.

When Jesus says, *"You did not choose Me, but I chose you,"* He gently but firmly removes discipleship from the realm of human decision-making and places it within the eternal will of God. This statement does not deny that men respond, believe, and follow; rather, it reveals that behind every genuine response stands a prior divine choice. The disciple's journey does not begin with human desire for Christ, but with Christ's desire for the disciple. Before the will of man ever stirred toward God, the will of God had already moved toward man. Discipleship, therefore, is rooted not in human seeking to follow Christ, but in divine seeking to make disciples by grace.

This truth humbles the heart and quiets the soul. It strips away spiritual pride and anxiety alike. If discipleship began with our choosing, it would depend upon our consistency, strength, and perseverance. But because it begins with Christ's choosing, it rests upon His faithfulness, wisdom, and power. Jesus does not say, "You have chosen wisely," but "I have chosen you." The security of the disciple is found not in the quality of his commitment, but in the certainty of Christ's call and choice.

Divine Appointment

Yet the Lord goes further. He says, *"I chose you and appointed you."* The choosing is eternal; the appointing is purposeful. God's sovereign election is never arbitrary or static. It always moves toward expression. To be chosen by Christ is to be set apart for participation in His life and mission. This appointment is not first to activity, but to fruitfulness. Fruit is not something the disciple manufactures for God; it is something Christ produces in the disciple as His life flows freely within.

Here we see again the distinction between partnership and union. In a partnership, two parties contribute effort toward a shared goal. In union, one life supplies everything. Jesus does not appoint His disciples to struggle to produce fruit, but to *bear* fruit. Fruit-bearing is organic, not mechanical. It is the natural outcome of abiding in the Vine. The disciple does not create life; he receives life. He does not generate fruit; he bears what the life of Christ produces through him. The fruit Christ speaks of is not merely outward activity or visible success in ministry. It is the fruit of divine life — Christ's character, love, obedience, righteousness, and life expressed through human vessels. This fruit is said to *remain*. Human works fade, programs end, and achievements pass away, but fruit born of divine life endures because its source is eternal. What God produces by His Spirit carries His permanence.

This is why sovereignty and fruitfulness are inseparably linked. Because the disciple is chosen and appointed by Christ, the fruit does not depend on circumstance, ability, or personal strength. God Himself stands behind the outcome. The same sovereign grace that chose the disciple ensures the fruitfulness of the disciple. As Scripture elsewhere affirms, *"Faithful is He who calls you, who also will do it"* (1 Thessalonians 5:24).

Jesus then connects this sovereign choosing and fruitful appointment to prayer: *"That whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you."* This is not a promise detached from context, nor a blank authorization for self-directed requests. It is the outflow of union. When a disciple abides in Christ, and Christ abides in him, the will of God shapes the desires of the heart. Prayer ceases to be an attempt to persuade God and becomes an expression of shared life and purpose. The disciple asks in Christ's name not merely by using His words, but by living in His will.

Here again, sovereignty brings rest. Prayer is not effective because the disciple has learned the correct technique, but because the disciple has been drawn into alignment with the heart of God. What is asked flows from what God Himself is working within. As Scripture testifies, *"If we ask anything according to His will, He hears us"* (1 John 5:14). The asking is itself the fruit of divine initiative.

Conclusion: God's Sovereignty in Christian Discipleship

Thus, John 15:16 reveals a complete and beautiful picture of discipleship under God's sovereign hand. The disciple is chosen by Christ, appointed by Christ, indwelt by Christ, made fruitful by Christ, and heard by the Father because he stands in Christ. At no point does discipleship rest on human autonomy. From beginning to end, it is God who works — to will and to do—for His good pleasure.

This truth guards us from both pride and despair. It prevents us from boasting in our calling, for we did not choose Him. And it delivers us from fear of failure, for He has appointed us to bear fruit that remains. True discipleship, therefore, is not striving to prove our usefulness to God, but resting in the certainty that He has already purposed our fruitfulness in Christ.

Here are the deep comfort and holy confidence of the disciple: the God who chose him will sustain him; the Christ who appointed him will express His life through him; and the Father who hears him will accomplish His will in him. This is sovereignty not as cold decree, but as living grace—grace that calls, carries, and completes the work of God in those who are truly His.

Thus, living in union with Christ is the very essence of true Christian discipleship. It is not Christ beside us, helping us live a better life. It is Christ within us, being our life. The disciple does not ask, "What would Jesus do?" but lives from the deeper reality: "Christ is living in me." This is the rest of faith. This is the power of the Gospel. This is the life to which we have been called. It is the reality of existence of a true Christian disciple. As we have already seen, spiritual reality is discerned not by human perception but by revelation received by faith.

Chapter 14

True Christian Discipleship and the Divine Administration of the Fullness of Times

"The mystery of His will… which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth — in Him" (Ephesians 1:9-10).

Christian Discipleship in God's Eternal Purpose

All that has been unfolded in this book — union with Christ, the end of the self, crucifixion and resurrection, discipleship, ministry, and service — finds its final meaning only within the eternal purpose of God. Discipleship is not an end in itself. It is not merely God's work in perfecting individual believers. It is the means by which God is carrying forward a purpose far larger than any single life: the gathering together of all things in heaven and on earth in Christ.

Scripture reveals that before God created the world, before sin entered history, before redemption was needed, God already had a purpose. The apostle Paul calls this purpose "the mystery of His will… which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth — in Him" (Ephesians 1:9–10). Here, discipleship is lifted out of the realm of personal spirituality and placed within the administration of God's eternal design.

This divine administration — the dispensation of the fullness of times — is not a human program, nor a theological system, but the orderly working of God in history to bring everything into harmony under the headship of His Son. From eternity, God purposed that Christ would not only redeem fallen humanity, but become the center, head, and unifying life of all creation. The fullness of times refers not merely to a future age, but to the completion of God's long and patient work in bringing all things into their proper relation to Christ.

Within this vast purpose, discipleship occupies a precise and necessary place. God is not forming disciples merely to improve their conduct, enrich their experience, or prepare them for heaven. Disciples of Christ are God's sons who share the life of His Son, so that through them Christ may be expressed in the earth as part of this greater gathering. What God is doing inwardly in the believer is directly related to what He is doing universally in Christ.

God's Life in the New Creation in Christ

Discipleship begins with union with Christ in whom is the fullness of the Godhead and who is also the head of all principality and power (Colossians 2:9-10). The disciple's union with Christ means his union with the Godhead. God is not gathering things by external authority alone, but by imparting His own life. Only what shares Christ's life can be rightly gathered under Christ's headship. Discipleship, therefore, is God's way of producing a people who belong to the new creation and do not live by Adam's life, separated from God, but by Christ's life in union with God.

Christian disciples thus have become fitting vessels in God's eternal administration of the new creation order. Seen in this light, the Cross and the resurrection are not only redemptive acts; they are administrative acts in God's eternal purpose. Through the Cross, God ends the old creation in Adam. Through resurrection, He introduces the new creation in Christ. Discipleship unfolds within this transition from one order of existence to another. Every believer who is crucified with Christ and raised with Him becomes a living testimony that God's new order has already begun.

The Ministry and Message of Reconciliation

The Scriptures strongly affirm the truth that God's new creation order has begun through the Cross and resurrection of Christ. 2 Corinthians 5:17 points out that the new creation is rooted in Christ Himself, who acts as the vital womb — the transformative source from which all things are made new. The Scriptures also reveal the deep connection between our personal reconciliation to God in Christ and His larger mission to reconcile the entire world to Himself. This mission is part of His eternal purpose, and He has entrusted us with the ministry and message of reconciliation. "Now all things *are* of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself… and has committed to us the word of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:18-19).

Thus, discipleship in ministry and service finds its true meaning here. It is not merely expressions of compassion or obedience but means by which Christ's life is extended into the world carrying the ministry and message of reconciliation. Through those who live by His life, having been reconciled to God in Him, Christ touches, gathers, heals, enlightens, and prepares humanity for that final unity in which all things will be brought under His headship. Even the quietest act of Christ-life expressed in a disciple participates, in its measure, in this divine administration of the fullness of times.

Revealing of the Sons of God in the New Creation

The Scriptures lead us still further to understand how discipleship's impact on the whole creation through its expression of Sonship involves it in the divine administration of the fulness of times. The apostle Paul declares that "the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God", and that creation itself "will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God" (Romans 8:19–21). Here, the gathering together of all things in Christ is seen not only as a future decree, but as a process already advancing through the manifestation of Christ's life in the sons of God.

Creation is not waiting merely for an event, but for a people in whom the life of the Son is openly expressed. It is waiting for men and women who no longer live by Adam's life, but by Christ's life — sons who are already of the new creation in Christ. As the Son of God lives in His disciples and is expressed through their ministry and service, the powers of the coming order quietly enter the present age. The life that will one day renew all things is already at work wherever Christ lives freely in His people.

Thus, the manifestation of the sons of God is not an abstract doctrine, but a living reality within true discipleship. Every life governed by Christ, every act of service flowing from His life, every expression of His nature participates in this great movement by which God is liberating creation and bringing all things into harmony in His Son. Discipleship is therefore not only for the church, but for the world; not only for redemption, but for newness of life; not only for salvation, but for the restoration of all things in Christ.

The Divine Dignity of Every Disciple

This understanding guards the believer from both pride and discouragement. No disciple is insignificant, for everyone in whom Christ lives has a place in God's eternal purpose. At the same time, no disciple is central, for the purpose does not revolve around any individual, but around Christ Himself. The believer's calling is not to achieve importance, but to remain available to life.

Thus, true Christian discipleship is revealed in its highest dignity. It is God's sovereign work in human lives for a universal end. What begins as union with Christ inwardly moves outward into ministry and service, and from there into God's great work of gathering all things in Christ. The disciple may see only a small portion of this purpose, but he lives within a design that spans eternity.

This is why discipleship is never wasted. Nothing formed by Christ's life is lost. Every work of God in the believer is part of something far greater than the believer himself. God is not merely preparing individuals for glory; He is preparing creation for Christ.

Conclusion: Rest in God's Eternal Purpose

As this chapter brings the book to its close, the call that remains is not a call to effort, but to rest and worship. Discipleship is not sustained by human strength, but by divine faithfulness. It is not directed by human vision, but by God's eternal counsel. And it is not moving toward an uncertain end, but toward the sure fulfillment of the mystery of His will.

May the reader, in beholding this purpose, find deep rest in knowing that to live in union with Christ is already to live within God's eternal design. And may Christ Himself be expressed and glorified in those whom God is gathering — until all things in heaven and on earth are finally brought together in Him, to the praise of His glory.

About the Book, the Author, and the Publisher

About the Book

True Christian Discipleship: Living in Union with Christ presents a Spirit-led, Scripture-grounded unveiling of discipleship as God's work, not man's effort. Departing from conventional models that emphasize self-denial as moral striving, this book reveals discipleship as the lived expression of union with Christ—where death to self, crucifixion, burial, and resurrection are not sequential tasks, but inseparable aspects of a single divine reality accomplished in Him.

Through a clear and flowing exposition, the reader is guided to see that true discipleship does not begin with commitment, discipline, or imitation, but with participation in Christ's life. Selflessness is shown not as a virtue to be cultivated, but as the natural fruit of Christ living in the believer. Ministry and service are likewise presented not as human activity for God, but as Christ's life expressed through those who rest in Him.

Rooted in God's eternal purpose and sustained by His sovereign working, this book calls believers out of self-effort and into the freedom of living by Christ as life. Written for those who hunger for spiritual reality rather than religious form, it invites the reader to a deeper understanding of discipleship as life shared, not life achieved.

About the Author

G. A. N. James, PhD has served the Body of Christ for nearly six decades in missionary ministry, pastoral care, teaching, writing, and spiritual counseling, proclaiming the gospel of the Kingdom and the present truth of divine sonship across several nations.

Having devoted his life to walking in the Spirit and declaring the revealed Word of God without embellishment or tradition, he now devotes his time to Spirit-guided writing from a quiet place of retreat in Bombo, Uganda. He prefers no religious titles and identifies simply as a brother in Christ, a member of the Body of Christ, called to expound the truths of the new creation, discipleship, divine sonship, the true Church, and the Kingdom of God.

He freely distributes all his writings for the nourishment and edification of God's elect, trusting that the Spirit will carry the message to those appointed to receive it.

About the Publisher

Kingdom Gospel World Mission is a Christ-centered, non-denominational ministry dedicated to proclaiming the gospel of the Kingdom and making freely available Spirit-led writings that edify, enlighten, and equip the sons of God worldwide.

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